

AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL AND AESTHETIC ASPECTS
IN THE EARLY WORK OF BESTUZHEV-MARLINSKY.

BY

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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of the Political and Aesthetic Aspects in the Early Work of Bestuzhev-Marlinsky. (1797 - 1837)

The above-named thesis has as its objective a clear, concise exposition of the work of an important Russian writer whose influence on the development of Russian literature has never been sufficiently appreciated. It treats the opening phase of his literary activity, from 1818 until the Decembrist rebellion of 1825, a period particularly neglected in the past.

It is divided into three sections, the first of which discusses the problems besetting the would-be critic or reader of Bestuzhev, as well as the European background and its effect on Russia generally and on Bestuzhev in particular. The second determines the political aspects of his work, endeavouring to demonstrate the link between his role as member of the Decembrist society, with especial emphasis on his attitude to the political and economic position of Russia, and his early writing. The third section is devoted to an account of the aesthetic principles of his work, outlined against the background of contemporary Russian literature, represented primarily by the Sentimentalists and Decembrists, and the influx of ideas from Western Europe, dominated by the trend of romanticism.

The originality of the first and second parts lies in the attempt to resolve the conflict between pre-revolutionary critics, who considered Bestuzhev's tales devoid of serious meaning, and Soviet critics who assume a priori their patent revolutionary ideology. Although the discussion is weighted on the latter's side, it reveals the reasons prompting earlier critics to reach their conclusions and revises the overstatement of the Soviet case.

The third part investigates more deeply than ever before the full extent of Western European influence on Bestuzhev - a phenomenon almost completely ignored by Soviet criticism.

The whole is a comprehensive survey of the three main facets of Bestuzhev's literary output - prose, criticism and poetry, clarifying his conception of romanticism, his political views, the part he played in creating a specifically Russian linguistic medium, and finally his significant contribution to the literary debates and political whirlpool of the 1820's.

CONTENTS.

PREFACE	4
ABBREVIATIONS	6
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATIONS.	7
<u>PART I</u>	
CHAPTER <u>I</u> Bestuzhev in Russian Criticism.	8
CHAPTER <u>II</u> Political background of Europe and its impact on the Russian scene.	14
<u>PART II</u>	
CHAPTER <u>III</u> Bestuzhev's involvement in politics.	30
a) apparent lack of seriousness.	31
b) involvement in Decembrist revolution.	36
c) direct political writing.	53
CHAPTER <u>IV</u> Literature and politics. 1 : Views.	58
a) Bestuzhev's comments on connection between literature, politics and life.	59
b) Bestuzhev's literary criticism as part of Decembrist literary ideals.	64
CHAPTER <u>V</u> Literature and politics. 2 : Work.	112
a) Works that may be considered political and Decembrist.	113
b) Works that may be interpreted as political and Decembrist.	148

PART III

CHAPTER <u>VI</u>	Aesthetic Considerations. 1 : Thematics.	186
	a) Bestuzhev and Western European Literature.	187
	b) Bestuzhev and the Gothic Novel.	220
	c) Bestuzhev and Scott.	231
	d) Bestuzhev and Byron.	242
CHAPTER <u>VII</u>	Aesthetic Considerations. 2 : Language and Style.	261
	a) Language.	262
	b) Style.	277
CONCLUSION		312
APPENDIX <u>I</u>	Cross-references to Bestuzhev's works quoted in the text.	319
APPENDIX <u>II</u>	Translation of Bestuzhev's Letter to the Tsar.	339
BIBLIOGRAPHY		356

PREFACE.

The present thesis is confined to the opening phase of Bestuzhev's literary activity from 1818 to 1825; it is justifiable to consider the Decembrist revolution and the first years of Bestuzhev's exile as creating a sizeable gap between his early work and his later work of the 1830's until his death in 1837. Moreover the later tales and articles yield no evidence, except for that which is referred to herein, concerning Bestuzhev's political views, since he was constantly subjected to the strictest surveillance by the tsarist authorities in the capacity of a state criminal. ^{from the stylistic angle} ~~In addition,~~ his later work is only a development from his early work and does not necessitate substantial treatment; where necessary, reference is made to the developments of style in the later tales.

The thesis is divided into three sections, which deal with the political aspects of his work and the aesthetic aspects. The originality of the first two parts resides in the attempt to resolve the conflict between pre-revolutionary critics, who considered Bestuzhev's tales devoid of political significance, and Soviet critics who take for granted their patent revolutionary ideology. This is achieved by demonstrating the link between his role as a member of the Northern Society of the Decembrists and his writings, whilst at the same time revealing the reasons which prompted earlier critics to arrive at their conclusions and revising the exaggeration of the Soviet argument. The originality of the third part lies in an appreciation of the influence of Western European literature on Bestuzhev, in the form of an unprecedentedly extensive analysis of this

phenomenon - one, in fact, which is almost utterly ignored by Soviet critics in their nationalistic approach to Bestuzhev's work.

Lastly, the special interest of this thesis is its endeavour to allot Bestuzhev his rightful place in the development of Russian politics and literature as an outstanding critic and story-teller and participant in the Decembrist rebellion, until in the 1830's he was revered and loved by the Russian public as the leading Russian novelist. His influence and importance have scarcely ever been adequately evaluated and the period from 1818 to 1825 has been particularly neglected in the past. This thesis serves both as an introduction to the work of Bestuzhev and as an explanation of his popularity and faded charm. Finally it exposes the failure of Bestuzhev to realise in his own work the standards and ideals he set for other writers and himself.

ABBREVIATIONS.

M Moscow.
L Leningrad.
SPb St. Petersburg.
AN Akademiya nauk.
IRLI Institut russkoy literatury.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATIONS.

The transliteration used in this work is in accordance with that set out in the Slavonic and East European Review, London, 1922 - .

All translations, whether from the work of Bestuzhev or any other writer, are purely my own in both poetry and prose.

Bestuzhev in Russian criticism.

PART 1

Chapter 1.

Bestuzhev in Russian criticism.

V. I. Vagner, *Sobremennye russkiye kritiki*,
Moscow, 1924, Vol. 3, p. 152.

Before an attempt can be made to examine the political content of Bestuzhev's early work, composed between the years of 1818 and 1825, one must first of all come to grips with an important controversy. It is striking to note the different approaches taken, by pre-revolutionary and Soviet critics concerning the involvement of Alexander Bestuzhev in the political events of his time and the subsequent reflection in his writings of his political leanings.

Pre-revolutionary critics stressed that the lack of pronounced political affiliations in Bestuzhev's life excluded the presence of political notions in his literary work. Vengerov upheld the theory that Bestuzhev's political activity was a mere coincidence and denied the possibility of civil themes in Bestuzhev's work. He claims that Bestuzhev's participation in the plot was accidental, the outcome of his love of danger, and owing to the influence of his friends, whereas other conspirators such as Pestel', Kakhovsky, Ryleyev, Nikolay Bestuzhev and Baten'kov joined because social activity was second nature to them. Consequently, Bestuzhev's work never touched upon social and political themes, he insists. ¹

1. S. A. Vengerov, Kritiko-biograficheskiy slovar' russkikh pisateley i uchenykh. SPb. 1892, vol. 3, p. 157.

Zamotin too adopts this attitude, and declares that Bestuzhev was drawn into the Decembrist movement and wanted to play a leading part in it because it was ideologically akin to the romantic epoch, and his own romantic temperament, namely his passionate individualism, responded to it impetuously and joyously. ¹ Hence Zamotin likewise pays the minimum of attention to the social protest contained in Bestuzhev's work.

Precisely the identical point of view is taken by Pypin, who refuses to accept Bestuzhev as a sincere and influential member of the Decembrist Northern Society, stating that although he played an active role in the events of the revolution of the 14th. December, his part in the conspiracy was not a large one; he was far from being a political figure and concerned himself primarily with literature, social life and amorous adventures. ² As a corollary to this, Pypin minimises the effect of social topics on Bestuzhev's literary ^{work} activities, and distinguishes him from Ryleyev, his friend and fellow-conspirator, who aspired towards civil themes in poetry.

Kotlyarevsky is also fairly insistent that Bestuzhev did not consider political thought an intellectual necessity nor political action a necessity of temperament, ³ and goes on to say that his liberalism was

1. I.I. Zamotin, Romanticheskiy idealizm v russkom obshchestve i literature 20 - 30' Kh godov^{XV} stoletiya, SPb. 1907, p. 170. This is the second vol. of Romantizm dvadtsatykh godov XIX stoletiya v russkoy literature. Warsaw 1903.

2. A.N. Pypin, Istoriya russkoy literatury, vol. 4, SPb. 1907, p. 430.

3. N.A. Kotlyarevsky, Dekabristy Knyaz' A.I. Odoyevsky; A.A. Bestuzhev Marlinsky, SPb. 1907, p. 124.

not a deep conviction which he had acquired through long deliberation. Bestuzhev in fact, he asserts, looked fairly lightly on his political agitation.¹ It follows therefore that Kotlyarevsky did not observe anything revolutionary in Bestuzhev's work, and indeed he avers that the works and correspondence of Bestuzhev up and until the Decembrist insurrection do not contain any hints at all at even the most general, let alone political, liberalism.²

On the other hand, modern critics support the thesis that Bestuzhev was an eminent Decembrist thinker and activist. Nechkina writes that Alexander Bestuzhev was a man of unquestionable revolutionary zeal, who chose to lead the Moskovsky regiment to rebellion as this was the least reliable one and constituted a task that therefore demanded special efforts.³ Sharupich is another who considers Bestuzhev to be one of the most energetic plotters, being the friend and collaborator of Ryleyev, a member of the Supreme Duma of the Northern Society, the organiser and leader of the armed revolt.⁴ Maslin likewise has no misgivings about affirming the radical position occupied by Bestuzhev in the Northern Society of the Decembrists and the active part played by him in the preparation and carrying out of the rebellion.⁵ Stepanov discusses him

1. Kotlyarevsky, op. cit. p 125.

2. Ibid. p 122.

3. M.V. Nechkina, Dvizheniye dekabristov, vol. 1. M - 1955, p 131.

4. A. P. Sharupich, Dekabrist Alexander Bestuzhev, Minsk, 1962. pp 15 & 17.

5. N. Maslin, "A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky" in A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky. Sochineniya v dvukh tomakh, vol. 1. M - 1958, p 3.

in the strongest possible political terms, and asserts that his publication of the Polar Star, his reviews which propagandised new political ideas, his agitational songs, and his actions on the 14th. December, all bear witness to the fact that he was deeply impressed with revolutionary ideology and played a significant role in the Decembrist movement.¹ Mordovchenko and Bazanov are still further examples of Soviet critics who relate the literary work of Bestuzhev to his participation in the Decembrist secret society and regard the two as inextricably linked and interdependent.² There existed, therefore, a close connection between Bestuzhev's life and his work, an understanding that his attitude to everyday reality and the political struggle being waged, if carefree and lighthearted, would of itself prove the lack of political comment in his work, but if serious and sincere, would demonstrate the presence of political thought.

It would be pointless to proceed without defining at this juncture the term "political", as it would prove impossible to resolve the conflict described above with no point of reference as a yardstick by which to judge matters. It is here taken in its widest possible sense to include all aspects of social and parliamentary affairs, thereby signifying in the present context such questions as might be termed military, judicial, religious, moral, financial, economic, literary,

1. N.L. Stepanov, "A.A. Bestuzhev - Marlinsky", in A. Marlinsky: Izbrannyye Povesti, L - 1937, p 6.

2. N. Mordovchenko, "A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky" in Bestuzhev-Marlinsky - Sobraniya stikhotvoreniy, M - 1948, passim.

and, V. G. Bazanov, Ocherki dekabristskoy literatury, M -1953. passim.

educational, and ideological. This is by now an accepted definition of numerous critics, especially with reference to Russia, where literature and society or literature and politics are so commonly linked. Brinton regards politics as a combination of religion, philosophy, , literature, industry, commerce, agriculture and so forth, and for him the words political and social are interchangeable.¹ For Rickwood crucial political events are synonymous with what he calls the social setting.² Herford discusses the reconstruction of politics in the Romantic period as an attempt to reorganise society; to attain political and individual freedom was only possible in social terms.³ Dowden also discovers the roots of the French Revolution and general political dissatisfaction in "the unreasonable and unfeeling arrangements of society",⁴ and its cure in a return to simplification in social life.⁵ He constantly identifies political liberty with man's freedom as a social being. This conception of politics as inclusive of the whole framework of society is readily applicable to Russia, whose critics have consistently looked upon political and social ideas as one and the same. In this debate on the political content of Bestuzhev's work, his social criticism will be expounded under the heading of political criticism, since the dividing line is in fact not so very marked.

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1. Crane Brinton, The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists, Oxford, 1926. p 1.
 2. Edgell Rickwood, "The Social Setting", in From Blake to Byron, London, 1962, p 11; this is vol. 5 of A Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford.
 3. C.H. Herford, The Age of Wordsworth, London, 1897. pp xvi - xdi.
 4. Edward Dowden, The French Revolution and English Literature, London 1897. p 9
 5. Ibid. p 14.

Chapter 11

Political background of Europe and
its impact on the Russian scene.

The French Revolution had an enormous impact throughout the length and breadth of Europe, and as a result the whole trend of European literature, thought and politics was to some extent determined in relation to France, whose stormy fate provoked varying reactions amongst governments, nations and writers. There were those who enthusiastically welcomed the Revolution and all it entailed, such as Paine, Priestley, Mackintosh, Burke and Goethe, and those who resented its message and approached it with fear and hostility, amongst whom were Robespierre and his followers. However this might be, the central focal point of the

1. This chapter is intended as introductory material, which serves to give the general atmosphere of the period. Fuller treatment can be found

The years prior to the Decembrist revolution of 1825 were years of political ferment in Russia, conditioned by events and ideas which infiltrated into Russia from Western Europe and by the peculiar situation existing in Russia itself. ¹It is hard to pinpoint the precise date when Europe found itself undergoing a rapid transition from the old feudal, industrial, political, and ecclesiastical state of affairs to a new era of revolutionary fervour and promises of better things to come in a reconstructed social order. Midway through the eighteenth century, a spark was lit by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who has been commonly recognised as the most potent single influence on the revolutionary movement in France as well as the literary movement; those of the French revolutionary theorists, including Helvétius, Holbach, and Condorcet, played no small part either.

The French Revolution had an enormous impact throughout the length and breadth of Europe, and as a result the whole trend of European literature, thought and politics was to some extent determined in relation to France, whose stormy fate provoked varying reactions amongst governments, nations and writers. There were those who ecstatically welcomed the Revolution and all it entailed, such as Price, Priestley, Mackintosh, Paine and Godwin, and those who resented its menace and approached it with fear and hostility, foremost among whom were Burke and de Maistre. However this might be, the central focal point of the

1. This chapter is intended as introductory material, which serves to give the general atmosphere of the period. Fuller treatment can be found

century was the French Revolution of 1789, which engendered a whole range of ideas - on unlimited human progress, the perfectibility of man, the necessity for emancipation and freedom, the value of human reason, and above all the unharnessing and enfranchisement of the emotions and passions. The fall of the Bastille was a symbol of the destruction of the old world, with its harsh laws, pitiless administration, overpowering prejudices, artificialities, conventions and complexities; and from the ruins and ashes of the Ancien Régime, there promised to emerge the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity which would bestow longed-for happiness on mankind.

An astonishing historical reversal took place. The formation of the new society was halted abruptly by the downfall of the Napoleonic empire and the result was catastrophic for the forces of liberalism. The political reins were once more put under the control of the reactionary governing classes. The European monarchies, along with the nobility and the church, found themselves re-instated, and set about consolidating their position using all the means at their disposal. In their bitterness and resentment, the ruling authorities proved excessively conservative and despotic; they lived in constant dread of revolutionary ideas, and hence resorted to instituting the secret police, restoring the prestige of the Church, controlling education, banning the works of the writers of the Enlightenment such as Voltaire,

in the following works:-

Frederick B. Artz. Reaction and Revolution. New York, 1963.

C. Brinton. The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists. Oxford, 1926.

hunting down, persecuting and executing revolutionary leaders. And so, the opening decades of the nineteenth century were black ones throughout the whole of Europe; in Italy the liberal Carbonari groups faced implacable hostility on all sides; in Spain it was the Society of the Exterminating Angel which brought the higher clergy, monarchy and aristocracy into a common front in the stand against liberalism; in England the government was led by the most conservative wing of the Tory party, such men as Liverpool, Castlereagh and Eldon who opposed reform and whose programme seemed to consist in simply repressing internal dissent; France too had lapsed after the brief return of Napoleon from Elba into severe censorship of the press and rigged trials and aristocratic domination; Austria's Prince Metternich had become the very symbol of conservatism, obscurantism, and absolutism.

But all was not lost. The wave of ideas which had surged in the latter half of the eighteenth century could not be held in check. Once again the 1820's saw the wind of change blowing; liberal ideas rose phoenix-like and were crystallised in a series of revolutionary disturbances. Spain, Portugal, Piedmont, Naples, and Greece saw the existing order overthrown temporarily by a supreme revolutionary effort; in England Thistlewood and his band of radical associates were foiled in their Cato Street Conspiracy to eliminate the whole Tory ministry;

E. Dowden. The French Revolution and English Literature. London, 1897.

C.H. Herford. The Age of Wordsworth. London, 1897.

in France, the Duc de Berri was assassinated, and a number of plots to get rid of the Bourbons met with failure.

The picture is one of universal aspiration to freedom, a grim battle against the powerful armies of reaction, against the Throne and the Altar, the name by which this period is popularly known.

These events were paralleled in Russia to a surprising degree. Alexander's earlier liberalism had afforded ecstatic hopes to all young Russian liberals. His unofficial committee, comprised of Kochubey, Czartoryski, Novosil'stëv and Stroganov, along with the proposed reforms of Speransky, promised great things. The Great Patriotic War of 1812, when so many Russians felt that their sacrifices on behalf of their country had won them the right to self-determination and free speech, served to strengthen this feeling of elation. But all this ^{discussion of change} ~~liberal programme~~ soon proved to be immaterial, a concoction of nebulous thoughts and vague phrases, giving way in time to tyranny. Dark reactionaries took over the helm; Arakcheyev, whose brutality was a by-word, increasingly wielded power in the administration of the state, as did Photius, a fanatical monk, in the affairs of the church. Prince Golitsyn, aided and abetted by Magnitsky and Runich, did his best to cramp education at all levels. Social reform now appeared out of the question, and in its place grew savage repression

N.A. Kotlyarevsky. Literaturnyye napravleniya aleksandrovskoy epokhi, SPb. 1907.

J.G. Robertson. A History of German Literature. Edinburgh, 1953.

on all fronts.

Just as in the rest of Europe, however, revolutionary ideas continued to gain impetus among groups of young liberal nobles, mostly disappointed and disillusioned army officers, who formed themselves into various secret societies. They were profoundly influenced by western European ideas, announced their resolve to overthrow the autocracy and set up a constitutional government, and were later known as the Decembrists since their attempt at revolution occurred on the 14th. December, 1825, thus falling into line with the general pattern of European revolts in the 1820's.

These political crises and developments could not help but be mirrored extensively in the literature of the times. From the very beginning the romantic writers espoused the ideals of free thought and democracy, and again in the 1820's the young generation of Romantics embraced the tenets of liberalism. There were, however, those romantics who sought an escape from the reality of political events and created their own type of transcendentalism. A schism existed therefore between two differing romantic movements, which may for the present purpose be termed political romanticism and transcendental romanticism.

The first of these revolved around Rousseau and his doctrine of the return to Nature and around the theories of the French materialist

J.L. Talmon. Romanticism and Revolt. London, 1967.

A. Veselovsky. Zapadnoye vliyaniye v novoy russkoy literature. M - 1896.

and atheistic thinkers. Rousseau's revolutionary naturalism found expression in his writings and took various forms; above all, two primary convictions were constantly driven home - the dignity of man and the power of natural scenery to respond to his needs; in Emile, the description of a perfectly adequate education arrived at by unforced methods and attractive environmental factors; in Du Contrat Social, the statement of equal and inalienable rights as a basis for political structure; in La Nouvelle Héloïse, the omnipotent force of love and passion; everywhere, in his revolt against ^{is} desiccated rationalism, emotion as the supreme rule and guide in life - known also as the sentiment, sensibility, heart, feeling, intuition, instinct.

English Romanticism was never escapist, but incessantly strove to represent the whole kaleidoscope of human life. The result was that the literature produced coincided closely with crucial political happenings. In no writer was this clearer than in William Godwin. His Enquiry Concerning Political Justice was a tract that allotted an unprecedented role to man's power of reasoning; he believed that all laws, customs, and institutions which interfered with the freedom of the individual should be abolished, namely war, courts, jails, property, the marriage bond. He was hereby propagating a state of moral anarchy, in which man could improve his intelligence, solve his problems, act rightly,

reasonably and justly because of his freedom of action, see the truth, and lastly attain perfection. Mind would master matter; the intellect would reign supreme; the highest moral order would be established, wherein all personal feelings, ties and prejudices would be destroyed and the principles of social justice would be accepted: principles involving man's duties to his fellow men, doing everything in his power to benefit them. In his novel Caleb Williams these ideas are reflected in his condemnation of inheritance, power, rank, wealth, law, and class distinction as creating dullness, grossness, overbearing arrogance, deception, injustice, and in his praise of the virtues of the free outlaw, comprising benevolence, comradeship and generosity.

Rousseauist and Godwinian political philosophy found its voice in the work of Wordsworth, who illustrated the anarchic return to Nature, an early enthusiastic acceptance of the revolutionary creed, and an adherence to the belief in the absolute moral and intellectual sufficiency of the individual. His friend, Coleridge, was deeply concerned with politics; most of his political thought is contained in his prose and political sonnets, and is based on the evils of monarchy, nobility, priesthood and judiciary, which can be rectified by constitution, civil government, freedom of the press, education of all classes, and the inspiration lent to the cause of freedom by dutiful

and righteous citizens. He invented together with his fellow- poet Southey the scheme of pantisocracy, which was a project with the aim of forming a small communistic society in South America. Southey was yet another whose earliest years were imbued with the dogma of natural goodness, the understanding that civilised society was corrupt, the realisation that France was leading the way to fraternity via liberty and equality, and so he accepted the Revolution's radiant promises and embodied its heroism, mettle, doctrine and rhetoric in his Wat Tyler, Fall of Robespierre, and Joan of Arc.

Blake early on welcomed the Revolution rapturously and the message of his poetry was a summons to action, made up of a bitter condemnation of contemporary civilisation with its unjust wrongs and a call to his generation to awake and exert its imagination. Although it is difficult to assess Burns as a revolutionary, there is no doubt that his wide appeal as the poet of humanity and the brotherhood of man, of the peasants and the poor, of ardent and undisciplined expression, of Equality above all, marks him out as a child of his times, as a true member of the European revolutionary movement.

It was Shelley and Byron who were in a sense the culmination of this political tendency in English poetry. Shelley demonstrated the poet's connection with society when he claimed: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world".¹ He opposed all tyranny,

1. The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley, ed. Harold Bloom, New York, 1966.
p 448.

discipline and restraint, suggested innumerable reformatory measures, and his poetry was concerned with the desire for justice and liberty for all mankind. No one more than Byron represented the revolutionary age; his name became the symbol of freedom throughout the length and breadth of Europe. He set his seal on a whole generation, which regarded him as a supreme example of the rebel against the social order and the poet as a man of action. His heroic death in the cause of the liberation of Greece, his satirical attacks on conservative supporters of the establishment, his outspoken criticism of present-day monarchies and high society, his humanitarian feelings for the poor and downtrodden, his portrayal of rebellious heroes asserting the supremacy of the individual will, and his freedom-loving verses, such as "Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,

Streams like the thunderstorm against the wind".¹

ensured his place among the leaders of the revolutionary spirit.

Not only literature, but the fields of economics and politics had their capable spokesmen too. Tom Paine, in his Rights of Man of 1791, answered Edmund Burke's attack on the French Revolution by reasserting his belief in democracy, republicanism, liberty and humanity. The publicist, William Cobbett, attained distinction with his Political Register, in which he commented on a whole host of aspects of English life.

1. The Poetical Works of Lord Byron, London, 1964, p 240.

Jeremy Bentham led a school of economic thought that protested against flagrant political abuses and called for widespread reforms. No economic, political or literary activist in England was left untouched, it would seem, by the tidal wave of European events.

In Goethe and Schiller Germany had its political commentators in literature. Goethe, in the preface to his autobiography, spoke of "the tremendous commotion of the universal political world, which had had the greatest influence upon me and the whole mass of my contemporaries".¹ His Götz Von - Berlichingen put forward a hero who attempts to found a new social order and preaches justice, compassion, love and truth as the lofty ideals to be pursued. Werther and Faust, like their forerunner, are humanists of the 18th. century, free thinkers, philanthropists and sentimentalists. Their role is humane and social. Schiller's Karl Moor, hero of The Robbers, is an idealist turned outlaw. He is a champion of human rights, an avenger of wrong. The Robbers is a panoply of contemporary thoughts, feelings and moods, reflecting a Rousseauist attack on the existing order and the hope of renewing the foundations of society. The Marquis Posa, in Schiller's Don Carlos, displays republican valour and civil prowess in his all-embracing interest in the people's spirit, ideas, strengths and institutions.

1. Goethe's Autobiography, Trans. R.O.Moon, London, 1932. pp XV - XVI.

The second romantic movement, which did not concern itself with politics, rested upon the critical idealism of Kant and was strongest in Germany. It occupied itself with the supremacy of the spirit, the power of the individual imagination, and the totality of experience and self-consciousness. The ideal and the real were inseparable, and life was equivalent to imagining and willing goodness or beauty. Art, therefore, became a means of deliverance from reality, not an expression or a sublimation of reality. The German romantic writers were content with escapism, longing, and the mysterious "beyond", and it was as though they had declared themselves emancipated from Nature in the name of Art. Tieck's works deal with horror, wonder, fate; Bürger's with the mysterious and grotesque; Novalis' with supernatural atmosphere and man's destiny; Fouqué's with legend, morality and sentimentality; Uhland's with mediaeval chivalry. The fairy tales of Goethe, Brentano and Hoffmann are permeated with the uncanny and the weird. Their general philosophy was transcendental and mystical; they were more interested in the infinite than in the finite world, and were too entranced by the questions they posed to worry about finding the answer to them. Their English counterparts, however, carried their imaginative enquiries to their conclusion in an endeavour to discover answers to the problems of everyday existence.

Russia's contacts with the West continued ~~unbroken~~ through the centuries and seemed to reach their zenith in the 19th. Peter the Great, in particular, encouraged links with Europe, and the Russian classicists were profoundly influenced by foreign writers. Tatishchev was acquainted with Western political and philosophical literature, such as the works of Locke, Hobbes, Bayle and Macchiavelli; Kantemir copied his satires, poems and odes from La Bruyère, Mathurin Régnier and Voltaire; Sumarokov openly imitated the methods of Voltaire, Racine and Molière. The thinkers of the West long determined the tastes and aspirations of Catherine the Great, who admired Montesquieu, Voltaire, Locke, Beccaria, Montaigne and Diderot. Fonvizin, Russia's leading playwright of that age, was obliged to La Bruyère, Voltaire, La Rochefoucauld, Holberg, Gessner and so on. Novikov's publications contained numerous translations from other languages, including the works of Shakespeare, Lessing, Milton and Bunyan. The writings of Helvétius, Mably and Rousseau gained in popularity. Radishchev chose as his authorities Abbé Raynal, Herder, Rousseau, Bayle, Bacon, Voltaire and Addison. Khemnitser, Kapnist, Derzhavin, Knyazhmin, and Karamzin, were heavily influenced by a whole host of Western European writers from Beaumarchais to Kant and Young. This infiltration of ideas into Russia was heightened in the early 19th. century when the doors to

Europe were flung wide open. In the hands of the Russian youth there circulated tracts issuing from the revolutionary West; they soon enthusiastically followed the political agitation there and learned to sympathise with every national liberation movement. Even Alexander's political programme was a replanting of Western ideas onto Russian soil. The Napoleonic invasion did not weaken the enthusiasm of the young generation for European culture. This young generation was formed by certain circumstances : the connections of the educated classes with the West, the general availability of books, the Russian students who were abroad, comparisons between the European way of life and the domestic situation, the influences of German, French and English liberalism, the liking for European literature and science: Their feeling for the rights of the individual was strengthened by the words of Byron, René, Adolphe, Posa, and Werther.

Such men as Nikolay Turgenev were fired with the desire for reform, proposed serious plans to rectify the status quo, and exhibited on all fronts extensive knowledge of Russian affairs. Kitchelbecker and Ryleyev lavished praise and wholehearted attention on the successes of the liberal movement and denounced tyranny in whatever quarter it might raise its ugly head. These Decembrist writers placed the aim of poetry higher than literary debates and aesthetic questions. Romanticism was for them the same as liberalism in politics, and their view hence had much in common

with the English and French literary theorists. For the Decembrists literature had a utilitarian function; its purpose was to serve the goal of social progress. They had no qualms about borrowing wholesale from Western authors, although their primary intention was to create a nationally independent literature. And so the solidarity of the Russian literary movement with the West was established. Whenever the Decembrists sought examples and guides in their various projects of reforms, they turned to Mackintosh, Bentham, Adam Smith, Beccaria, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Destutt de Tracy, Constant and others, for advice on matters regarding legislation, political science, agriculture, and economy. Paralleled by this trend was the reliance on foreign models in literature. To create their own historical past, Russian writers followed the pattern set by Scott, and to imbue their works with the current vogue of liberalism and individualism they modelled themselves on Byron. For their heroes in national life they chose Brutus, Riego, Chénier, Karl Sand, Kerner, and Byron, and for their literary heroes men who also rebelled against the tyranny of society, such as the Corsair and Karl Moor. Their heroes had to be men willing to lay down their lives for the sake of their country, supreme examples of patriotism and selflessness. This merging of literature and politics was to become a hallmark of Russian literature from this time on, furthered by the principles of Belinsky, Chernyshevsky and Dobrolyubov on art and society.

Alexander Bestuzhev, one of the foremost Russian critics and novelists of his time, could not escape the overpowering influence of political and literary trends. His critical reviews are littered with the names of all the most celebrated writers in Europe, showing his knowledge of their works. His letter to Tsar Nicholas I from the Petropavlovsk fortress indicates a profound awareness of the causes of social discontent in Russia, one of which he describes as the comparative political systems of Western Europe and Russia. Finally, he ascribes his liberal leanings to the sources of Western literature, - publicists, economists, poets, and others. There is no need to dwell on Bestuzhev's ideas at this point, since the development of his political and aesthetic views will be dealt with in the following chapters.

(a) Document 100 of 1917-1918.

PART 11

If we consider the opinions of Bestuzhev's contemporaries as to his character and the reasons for his entry into the Northern Society and his Chapter 111. a member, we may reach the conclusion, albeit a hasty one, that the opinions of Purgatory and the rest are well-grounded. Hence the leading publisher is St. Petersburg, described Bestuzhev as -

Bestuzhev's Involvement in Politics.

... a man, young, active, energetic, full of intelligence and talent and ready to accept for Bestuzhev's revolutionary activity as follows:

His entrance into this world of action and his determination to it I can attribute only to the influence of fanaticism, intellectual pride and the beguilement of activity

According to the opinion of his contemporaries he was intrinsically inferior to him in intelligence, talent, and character, he was inferior to him in all these respects, plunged into the whirlpool, and then could not or was unable to extricate himself, being guided by the voice of

1. V. I. Gusev, Iskra - Revolution, 1906, p. 103.

(a) Apparent lack of seriousness.

If one studies the opinions of Bestuzhev's contemporaries as to his character and the reasons for his entry into the Northern Society and his behaviour as a member, one can reach the conclusion, albeit a hasty one, that the opinions of Vengerov and the rest are well-grounded. Grech, the leading publisher in St. Petersburg, described Bestuzhev as -

a kind, frank, noble, handsome man, full of intelligence and talent.¹
and essays to account for Bestuzhev's revolutionary activity as follows:

his entrance into this band of Satan and his contribution to it
I can attribute only to the infectiousness of fanaticism,
unsatisfied pride and the braggadocio of nobility

Becoming acquainted with Ryleyev who was incomparably inferior to
him in intelligence, talent, and education, he was infected with
his absurd ideas, plunged into the whirlpool, and then could not
or was ashamed to extricate himself, being guided by the rules of

1. N. I. Grech, Zapiski o Moyey zhizni, SPb, 1886, p 393.

misconstrued nobility; he probably found pleasure in boasting and expatiating, and perished: He was also probably tormented by the desire to rise higher, to reach the level of the aristocrats who had a role in the society. ¹

Fyodor Glinka, a prominent Decembrist poet, wrote in his answers to the enquiry set up by the tsar:

Alexander Bestuzhev is a man with a romantic head I used to walk along sunk in thought, but he with a knightly step, and upon meeting, he would say to me - "To fight! To fight!" I always answered: "Enough chivalry! Live more quietly!" And later it was almost always discovered that there had been a duel somewhere and that he had been either a second or participant².

Several fleeting references by Bestuzhev himself to his own personality tend to add redoubtable weight to this side of the question. He consented to the destruction of the imperial family "as a braggart, but not a villain;" ²⁺

1. N.I. Grech, op cit., p 393.

2. Testimony of Glinka is to be found in IRLI, AN SSSR, or see Bazanov, Uchenaya Respublika, M - L, 1964, pp 317 - 334.

+ All quotations from the works of Bestuzhev are marked with asterisks, and can be found in an appendix, pp 319 - 338.

he defines his reactions upon hearing that Prince Constantine, whom he held in high affection, had refused the throne:

Then my blood boiled and intemperate patriotism disturbed my reason. *

Lastly he owns:

I am hot-headed but not mad, **

And pleads that he had acted "under the delusion of youth and unbridled imagination the lure of novelty and mystery". *** Later he blames his actions on "the hastiness of youth". ****

From the testimony of Bestuzhev's fellow-conspirators, it is possible to form a picture of him which accords with Grech's and Glinka's.

Baten'kov asserted:

But in general A. Bestuzhev was always known to me as a man openly capable of all extremities, ¹

and Trubetskoy confirms this description:

He was for the most part a hothead whenever he came to a conference and as far as I can remember the words "we can force our way into the palace" were uttered by him. ²

1. M.V. Dovnar-Zapolsky, Memuary Dekabristov, Kiev, 1906, p 175.

2. Ibid. p 316.

Trubetskoy states elsewhere:

he showed me great affection; I liked him and saw with regret that this young man with the kind heart and good soul was excessively carried away by his fiery imagination. I tried to win his trust so as to succeed in moderating the vehemence of his imagination and in correcting his way of thinking. ¹

Orlov likewise had a poor opinion of Bestuzhev's character, and noted his impressions:

everyone considers him senseless and only Murav'ev proclaims him a genius ²

while denouncing his conduct in society in no uncertain terms:

but Bestuzhev from the very outset behaved so nonsensically and indecently that no one would receive him as a guest. ³

Steingel's observation -

I noticed that A. Bestuzhev and Kakhovsky were keen terrorists. ⁴
supports the remarks made by Trubetskoy and Baten'kov.

1. M. V. Dvornar-Zapolsky, op.cit., p 88.

2. Ibid. p 8.

3. Ibid. p 11.

4. P.E. Shchegolev, Dekabristy, M - L, 1926, p 190.

Seen in this light, Bestuzhev would hardly have been the person to allow political reasoning to percolate into his fiction. Indeed, it is quite possible to read Bestuzhev's tales of knights and ladies, of castles and towers, of revenge and murder, as straightforward Gothic fantasies, in the tradition of German transcendental romanticism, which was more concerned with mystery and horror than with the realities of life. From this point of view, Roman and Olga is a simple love story, whose hero undergoes trials and suffering to win the hand of his beloved. Wenden Castle is the tale of two self-willed knights who clash in bloody conflict. Neuhausen Castle tells of the intrigues of a typical Gothic villain who meets his inevitable doom in ghastly fashion. The Reval Tournament treats the theme of chivalry, and once again the hero earns the right to his bride's hand. Eisen Castle narrates the career and downfall of a wicked Baron, interspersed with the triumph of the lovers over their oppressor and their ultimate tragic fate. Although it is impossible to deny the very obvious presence of the Gothic element in Bestuzhev's early work, it would be a total simplification of the issue to leave the matter there. It is necessary to see how far Bestuzhev can be connected with the political movement in Russia and the theories of political romanticism.

(b) Involvement in Decembrist revolution.

Whereas all the quotations cited above point to the shortcomings of Bestuzhev's political thought and activity, they nevertheless have led such critics as Vengerov into a grave misconception of the part played by Bestuzhev in the Decembrist movement and his ideological convictions. From his birth in 1797 to his arrest and imprisonment in 1825, Bestuzhev's whole existence revolved round the liberalism and revolutionary ferment which marked the end of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth. His father, Aleksandr⁺ Fedoseyevich Bestuzhev, was linked with the oppositional groupings and radical thought of the previous reign, was extremely well educated and devoted to enlightenment. He belonged to the group known as Radishchevites, named after the author of A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow ‡ - Alexander Radishchev. He was the friend and colleague of the greatest Radishchevite, Pnin, and together they published in 1798 the Saint-Petersburg Journal - an organ of radical political thought which preached the ideas of the materialist philosophy of the eighteenth century.¹ But the reign of Paul was hostile to such enterprises and a year later it was broken off. It was in such an atmosphere of culture and

+ Christian names in common usage, e.g. Tsar Alexander and Paul, as well as Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, are given as is the widespread custom, whereas others are transcribed directly from the Russian.

1. M.K. Azadovsky, "Memuary Bestuzhevykh kak istoricheskiy i literaturnyy pamyatnik" in Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh, ed. M.K. Azadovsky M - L, 1951, pp 597 - 598.

‡ Titles within the text are translated, except where inappropriate, as is the case with certain magazines.

learning that Alexander Bestuzhev spent his boyhood, in a house that was a "wealthy museum in miniature". ¹ His father strove to realise his pedagogical ideas in his own family, attributing great importance to questions of education. After his death, the eldest son Nikolay tried to continue his precepts in the upbringing of his younger brothers. Hence, a common spirit united them, and they all shared an interest in literature and knowledge, love for their country, and hatred for despotism and serfdom. ² Four of them took part in the Decembrist movement and were exiled, and the fifth was later implicated.

Bestuzhev's first act of political consciousness took place in the Autumn of 1820, when he visited the Semenovskiy regiment in Kronstadt. The whole regiment had been sent to the fortress for complaining against the cruelty of Colonel Schwartz, who had restored corporal punishment and flogged several soldiers. Bestuzhev sought leave to visit his younger brother, Pyotr, who was serving in Kronstadt, and wrote in a letter to E.A. Bestuzheva of the 27th. November, 1820 :

I was with the Semenovskiy regiment in the same place for several hours, the day after they were sent off, but now they are in Sveaborg. ³ "

1. Mikhail Bestuzhev, "Detsy^o i Yunost' A.A. Bestuzheva-Marlinskogo" in Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh, p 207.

2. Azadovsky, op. cit. p 600.

3. Pamyati Dekabristov, AN, SSSR, I - 1926, vol. 1. p 21. puts the date at 27th. October.

This visit bears witness to the ~~profound~~ sympathy Bestuzhev undoubtedly felt for his fellow-officers, who were the victims of the repression prevalent in Arakcheyev's military system. ¹

By this time Bestuzhev had already long been infected by the ideas he culled from his reading. In his testimony to the Investigatory Committee after the uprising, he confessed,

From nineteen years of age I began to read liberal books, and this set my head spinning. *

Not long after the Semensk^{ov}sky incident, Bestuzhev gave a further instance of his proclivity towards liberalism when in 1821 he broke off his literary contributions to Blagonamernyy,² which was the organ of the Society of the Lovers of Literature, Science and Art, as this organisation was becoming progressively more hostile to romantic tendencies and was headed by the reactionary A.E. Izmaylov..He joined at the end of 1820 the Free Society of the Lovers of Russian Literature, which was made up mostly of Decembrist writers, and here found a milieu

1. See G. Gabov, Obshchestvenno - politicheskkiye i filosofskkiye vzglyady dekabristov. M - 1954, pp 123 - 125.

2. The place and date of publication of periodicals can be checked in bibliography, p 356 onwards.

conducive to his liberal inclinations.¹ The Free Society was used for the propaganda of social ideas, and was practically synonymous to the revolutionary Decembrist Society.

The most decisive factor in the determining of Bestuzhev's career was his friendship with Kondratiy Ryleyev, the leader of the Northern Society, the founder of Decembrist aesthetic principles, and the inspirer of young liberals by virtue of his persuasive, oratorical powers. Bestuzhev thus relates how this ensued:

In 1822, when I was appointed aide-de-camp to General Bétancourt, I struck up an acquaintance with Ryleyev, and as we sometimes returned together from the society of the Combatants for Enlightenment and Philanthropy, we also dreamed together, and he captivated me still more with his fiery imagination. And so these dreams remained dreams till 1824, the year in which he told me that there existed a secret society, in which he was already accepted and would accept me. *

1. See N. Mordovchenko, "A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky", in Bestuzhev-Marlinsky-Sobraniye Stikhotvoreniy, M - 1948, p 12.

In May, 1822, Bestuzhev also met Griboyedov and when later questioned about this occurrence by the Investigatory Committee, replied:

With Griboyedov, as with a free-thinking man, I often dreamed of the desire to reform Russia. *

In fact, a study of the evidence available reveals that Bestuzhev, so far from being negligent in his adherence to the Decembrist programme, was ^{concerned with} ~~almost obsessed by~~ the unremitting thought of the betterment of conditions in Russia. Baten'kov presents the following account of two conversations he pursued with Bestuzhev:

I remained alone with Bestuzhev and we began to dream about the fate of Russia. We imagined it in a delightful condition, under a free government; I expressed the desire that we could enjoy freedom, and regret that there were no means for undertaking such a useful matter and that in all probability there were no men capable of upholding a constitutional government. He said that there were in fact men who were resolved on all. ¹

1. Dvornar-Zapolsky, op. cit. p 164.

The second occasion afforded a similar tête-à-tête between the two:

We said that a change was really necessary in Russia. He tried to impress on me the thought that it was preferable to achieve it ourselves than let others do it. ¹

When Kotlyarevsky avers that -

the spirit of political protest had never been particularly strong ²

in Bestuzhev, he ignores the fact that Bestuzhev was perpetually concerned with the amelioration of Russian actuality and was far from indifferent to political discussions. Trubetskoy refers to Bestuzhev's attitude towards Pestel', the leader of the Southern Society of the Decembrists and the staunch advocate of republican ideals -

I saw that although he did not trust Pestel' very far, as he thought him a cruel and ambitious man, yet he was charmed by his intelligence and was convinced that Pestel' judged matters extremely thoroughly and understood them in their true aspect. ³

Bestuzhev himself later agreed to the destruction of the royal family and

1. Dovnar-Zapolsky, op. cit. p 166.

2. Kotlyarevsky, op. cit. p 394.

3. Dovnar-Zapolsky, op. cit. p 88.

volunteered to execute this plan, as he now accepted the republican mode of government as most suitable.¹ He always attended the meetings of the Society, and in April, 1825, was appointed to the leadership along with Ryleyev and Obolensky.² That he should be allotted such a prominent position is an additional pointer to the esteem in which he was held by members of the Society, and his elder brother Nikolay testifies in his memoirs that Alexander enjoyed Ryleyev's friendship and trust.³

This in itself displays Bestuzhev's devotion to the cause of Decembrism, for a dedicated revolutionary such as Ryleyev would otherwise never have chosen him as a close friend and ally. Nikolay Bestuzhev gives the following portrait of Ryleyev:

The thought of being the tool of or a sacrifice to the elements of freedom filled the whole of his being and constituted the sole aim of his life. The liberation of his country or martyrdom for the sake of freedom as an example to future generations was his constant dream; this selflessness was not the inspiration of a moment but continually grew together with love for his country, which finally reached the point of passion, of lofty ecstatic fervour.⁴

1. Vosstaniye Dekabristov. Materialy, ed. M.N. Pokrovsky, vol. 1. M - L -1926, p 435.

2. Ibid. p 434.

3. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh, p 15.

4. Ibid. p 8.

Bestuzhev's very association with this man is an indication of his serious intentions. From the outset they had co-operated in the publication of the Polar Star - the highly successful Decembrist anthology of contemporary literature. Bestuzhev goes so far as to admit in his testimony after the revolution how far he was engrossed in political considerations, when he relates,

I adopted a free way of thinking primarily from books, and progressing gradually from one opinion to another, I took to reading French and English publicists, so much so that speeches in the Chamber of Deputies and House of Commons interested me as if I were a Frenchman or Englishman. *

But it was when theory had to be translated into practice that Bestuzhev showed himself at his best. He had always boasted of his willingness to take up arms against the autocracy; when Ryleyev and Obolensky reproached him for his apparent indifference, his retort was typical of his personality:

I told them that they were dreamers, but I was a soldier and prided myself on action not thought. **

And when the opportunity presented itself, Bestuzhev did not hesitate to prove his revolutionary fervour. On the 27th. November, 1825, Bestuzhev, his

brother Nikolay, and Ryleyev decided to spend the night walking round the town and informing the soldiers that they had been deceived since they had not been shown the will of the late tsar Alexander, which had granted freedom to the peasants and reduced military service from twentyfive to fifteen years. ¹ The effect of their efforts was astounding, as Nikolay Bestuzhev claims in his memoirs:

It is impossible to imagine the eagerness with which the soldiers listened to us; it is impossible to explain the speed with which our words were spread among the troops. ²

On the day designated for the uprising, the 14th. December, 1825, Alexander Bestuzhev was the first and foremost in the tragic and courageous endeavour to overthrow the autocracy. Early in the morning, accompanied by his brother Mikhail and Shchepin - Rostovsky, he went to the barracks of the Moskovsky regiment and roused the soldiers with his oratory, later explaining:

I spoke powerfully, they listened to me avidly. *

They marched to Senate Square, and Bestuzhev remained there while the grim

1. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevych, pp 30 - 31.

2. Ibid. p 31.

events of that fateful day unfolded. After the rout of the rebels by the Emperor's cannons, Bestuzhev did not flee in a panic, but on the contrary together with Nikolay Bestuzhev stopped several dozen men so as to defend the retreat and repulse any cavalry attack.¹ Nor during the day had he been without any definite plan, and declared in a letter to Nicholas I from the Petropavlovsk fortress:

If the Izmaylovsky regiment had joined us, I would have taken command and decided on an attempt to attack, the plan of which was already whirling in my head. *

Bestuzhev's behaviour becomes even more admirable when one considers the fact that Trubetskoy, who had been selected as "dictator", did not turn up for a variety of reasons.² Yakubovich, who was famed for his bravery and legendary duelling ability, also failed to fulfill his promise to rouse the Izmaylovsky regiment, although the leaders of the Northern Society "placed great hopes on his eloquence and figure!".³

1. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevych, p 42.

2. See A. Mazour, The First Russian Revolution, Stanford, 1937.

3. Vosstaniye Dekabristov, vol. 1. p 436.

Indeed, he even withdrew from the Square, complaining of a headache, and thereafter disappeared from the scene. ¹

According to the decision of the commission set up to decide the categories of criminals,

Junior-captain Alexander Bestuzhev. Plotted regicide and the annihilation of the imperial family; incited others to this; consented also to the deprivation of freedom of the imperial family. Took part in the design of a rebellion through the enticement of comrades and the composition of revolutionary verses and songs; was personally active in the revolt and stirred up lower ranks to take part in it. ²

It is evident that the commission clearly comprehended the full extent of Bestuzhev's implication in the rebellion, and indeed at first sentenced him to death - a penalty afterwards rescinded to twenty years penal servitude instead.

1. Vosstaniye Dekabristov, vol. 1. p 446.

2. Dekabristy. Otryvki iz istochnikov., Ed. Y.G. Oksman, pp 446 - 447.
M - L, 1926.

Not only is it possible to present the opposite side of the picture and create the image of Bestuzhev as an avowed political champion, but one can directly refute the theory that he was absolutely devoid of political convictions. Grech's opinion of Bestuzhev was coloured by his fear of reprisals on the part of the government, and in his desire to whitewash his relations with Bestuzhev, described the latter merely as a fanatical, proud braggart. ¹ Vengerov's statement that Bestuzhev only entered the plot because his friends did, is completely untrue, since Nikolay, Mikhail and Pyotr Bestuzhev, Sutgof, Panov, Kozhevnikov, Odoyevsky, Shehepin - Rostovsky, Wilhelm Kitchelbecker, Torson, and Arbuzov all entered after him. ² Moreover, the fact that Bestuzhev was by nature impetuous and boastful does not detract at all from his general outlook on the meaning of revolutionary idealism. This was merely one aspect of his character, and an assumed one at that, since he assured N. Polevoy in a letter of the 19th. July, 1831, that he himself had contributed to the legend of his lightheartedness:

1. Sharupich, op. cit. p 16.

2. V. Bogucharsky, "Semeystvo Bestuzhevykh", in ^{his} Iz proshlogo russkogo obshchestva, SPb, 1904, p 20.

My frivolity was a masquerade for the social carnival
Society amused me very rarely, but never captivated me. In the
circle of my own family I was myself. *

Even Bestuzhev's own acknowledgement of his wayward approach to life
and events cannot serve as a valid argument. The confessions he made
were extracted under intense pressure, in the loneliness and gravelike
stillness of the prison, hounded by importunate interrogation. The
natural desire to avert the sword of Damocles hanging over his head, to
alleviate his future lot, prompted him to attribute his crimes to his ~~cease~~
congenital recklessness. His abject renunciation of his previous
loyalties betrays his utter disillusionment and the fear he was subject to:

I now feel that I have used my talents for evil, that I could
have brought glory to my country with the sword or pen, lived
profitably and died honourably for the Emperor!
If by chance this paper reaches the Royal hands - then let
them see on it the stains of tears for a merited punishment
and tears of sincere repentance. **

Vengerov makes a distinction between Kakhovsky and Bestuzhev, numbering the former among serious participants of the Decembrist movement and calling the latter a chance participant. But there is no foundation whatsoever for this assumption or for separating Bestuzhev from his fellow-conspirators, simply because he was gay and effusive, notorious for his Don-Juanism and predilection to duels. He was not very different from other men of his milieu - officers, glutted in the atmosphere of the Great Patriotic War of 1812 - 1815, full of the stormy manifestations of youth - amorous adventures and innumerable duels, which were the consequence of the social ambiance in which these foremost men lived in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, a consequence of the oppressed society from which there was no escape despite their outstanding intellectual and moral qualities. ¹

In addition, Kotlyarevsky's remark that Bestuzhev regarded his own political agitation carelessly is unfounded. He took pains to persuade his brother Mikhail to transfer to the Guards and thereby utilise his powers in the best way to further the aims of revolution. ²

He undertook the transfer himself, and Mikhail became an officer in the

1. Bogucharsky, op. cit. pp 40 -41.

2. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevskikh, p 59.

Guards of the Moskovsky regiment, which was roused by them on the 14th. December. He showed enthusiasm in promoting the interests of the society by dissuading both Yakubovich and Kakhovsky from killing the tsar out of motives of personal revenge and hatred. * Finally, he considered the acceptance of members into the society as a matter of profound importance -

A member was not to be stained with a single base action, was to be of confessed disinterestedness, of firm character, brave, and even in good health, ** -

and advised:

So as to learn views - begin to contradict, and when he gets heated, see his views. Accept the reasonable on account of their arguments, and the fiery from their bright pictures of the future. ***

It was Bestuzhev who accepted Prince Odoyevsky, **** while Kakhovsky's reference to Bestuzhev reveals the latter to be himself a model member:

..... Alexander Bestuzhev, who was attracted to crime through his altruism and did not crave any profit¹

1. Shchegolev, op. cit. p. 193.

Comparison with Byron's career would yield further information on the type of person Bestuzhev himself was. Byron repeatedly gave the impression from his personal life that he was an unprincipled rake, whose whole attitude was one of self-advancement. It would appear that his political beliefs were not derived from reflection and conviction, but from transitory inclination, from the desire to add to the glamour of his own personality. It is possible to interpret his political acts as a liberal parade, inspired by bitterness and vanity. But this would give little justice to Byron's undoubted sincerity in his irreconcilable hatred of despotism and fervent eulogy of freedom. The same principle applies to Bestuzhev.

The fact that no evidence was discovered amongst the private correspondence of Bestuzhev as to his political opinions can be explained easily. It is very likely that his mother and sisters, having learned of the arrest and imprisonment of the brothers, burned everything in the house which could possibly incriminate them. A most natural reaction on the part of worried relatives thereby spared the Bestuzhevs unnecessary suffering but robbed historians of important documents. This theory seems all the more plausible when one contemplates the intensive spying prevalent in Russia in those years and the amazingly thorough investigations carried out by the Commission of Enquiry into the Decembrist affair.

No stone was left unturned by them, and any family under pressure would have acted similarly out of fear.

In conclusion, it can be seen ~~plainly~~ that Bestuzhev was drawn onto the path of rebellion by a feeling of aversion to the oppressive régime in Russia, advanced on this path in full awareness of the perils he risked, and sacrificed a promising career as the leading novelist and critic of his day to the ideals he held sacred. A final tribute to the Bestuzhev brothers as a whole was paid by another Decembrist, Rozen, who wrote:

All that was needed was to arrest Ryleyev, the Bestuzhevs, Obolensky, and two or three other Decembrists, and the 14th. of December would never have come about. ¹

1. A. E. Rozen, Zapiski Dekabrista, SPb, 1907, p 62.

(c) Direct political writings.

When under arrest in the Petropavlovsk fortress, Bestuzhev wrote his letter to the Tsar, entitled On the Historical Progress of Free Thought in Russia.¹ This is hardly the work of a political indifferentist, but on the contrary of a man who was both interested enough and qualified to give a studied review of Russia in the earliest decades of the nineteenth century. This document is outstanding as one of the best Decembrist treatises on the political situation, discussing as it does the psychological and economic factors which generated revolutionary ardour as well as the projects for reform harboured by the rebels. Bestuzhev omits no relevant details in his unwearied quest to set forth the truth.

He begins his analysis by describing the first years of Alexander's reign, an enviable period when all classes of society relished their present situation and lived in hopes of a brighter future. But the invasion of Napoleon meant that Russians discovered their national pride and could make comparisons with the lands they had visited on their campaigns. This served to open their eyes to the mass of abuses inherent in the Russian system; they bided their time and awaited the promised reforms, merely debating the various evils they wished to be eradicated. However, the years slipped away, and they came to realise that stagnation had set in. Their only recourse was the

1. This letter was written in 1825; it is to be found in the anthology Dekabristy, ed. V. Orlov, M-L, 1951. A translation of this letter is appended on pp 339 - 355 of the present work. The strictness of the

formation of secret societies, which were most popular among army officers who felt the injustice of their useless sacrifices most keenly. The other outlets of free speech and education were closed to them, owing to the existence of spies and the persecution of educational establishments and all enlightenment.

Bestuzhev then outlines the many factors which led the young Decembrist nobles to hatch their plot against the government. The latter did nothing to restore the ailing condition of the Russian provinces devastated by the Napoleonic troops. Vast areas were afflicted by rain, famine or drought, while additional suffering was caused by the brutality of landowners towards their serfs. District officials too practised numerous harsh measures which only served to increase the bitterness and resentment of the peasants. These regions were further burdened with military colonies which terrorised the population, with innumerable taverns which induced drunkenness, and with insurrections brought about by widespread discontent.

Bestuzhev goes on to analyse the dissatisfaction of all other classes in society. The middle class in Russia lacked respect and wealth and suffered from the decline in trade and their inability to establish roots in any town. The merchants were in an even worse quandary; many had been ruined and faced ruin, others were restricted by the guilds and had no means of delivering their goods. while yet

official censorship meant a scarcity of political documents of this nature. Hence the existence of this essay of Bestuzhev's and no other.

others were helpless when confronted by unwillingness to settle debts and refusal to accept their products. Fraudulent bankruptcies, the precarious tariff, the lack of ready cash, smuggling, the huge decline in trade, all contributed to their terrible hardships. The nobility were occupied with lawsuits, the oppression of their serfs, the search for luxury and high living, and thus neglected their estates which fell into decay as a result. The clergy in the country were unpaid and vice-ridden, while in the towns they were discontented because of certain edicts passed. The soldiers and sailors found their duties excessive and wearisome, and the officers were displeased with the insufficiency of their wages and the rigidly enforced discipline. Ambitious civil servants disliked the sycophantic methods of advancement, and scholars jibbed at the restrictions in study. The judicial places were tainted with extortion, bribery and corruption, so that justice was a mockery and robbery was the order of the day.

Having depicted Russia on the brink of revolution, Bestuzhev relates the intentions of the Decembrists respecting the formation of a new government. They relied on the support of the people and considered that they were acting in the name of the people. They wished to create a Senate comprising the most experienced administrators and a Palace of Deputies which would represent all classes of the people.

These democratic bodies would serve the interests of all people, and would therefore take care to ensure the incorruptibility of the lawcourts, and judges, the specialisation of each governmental department, the publicity and acceleration of legal proceedings, the freedom of the press, and the education of the lower classes. They would guarantee the livelihood of the clergy, the improvement of means of communication in the Empire, the growth of agriculture, the furtherment of industry. With this basis, foreign trade would flourish along with the demand for goods and the influx of foreign capital. The construction of a merchant navy would facilitate trade connections, and the finances of the country would be put on a more stable footing by cutting the army and officialdom by a third. Foreign policy would be conducted on the assumption that Russia was independent and desired to live in peace with all nations.

Bestuzhev admits that he personally preferred a constitutional monarchy. Owing to the youth of the Crown Prince, the government would feel free to put into practice the measures it deemed necessary. He points out that he hoped to participate in this parliament and was numbered among those who were suspicious of Nicholas because of the latter's reputation as a harsh despot, a lover of military rigour and enemy of enlightenment.

This letter of Bestuzhev's can be viewed as a comprehensive survey of the Decembrist political programme and attitude to Russian reality, revealing his acute insight into the mood of Russian youth and the difficulties confronting all social elements. It cannot be dismissed lightly in any examination of Bestuzhev's general work and political outlook.

Chapter 1V

Literature and politics.

1) Views.

- a) Bestuzhev's comments on connection between literature, politics and life.

The evidence that exists regarding Bestuzhev's opinions on the aim of literature is scanty. What is needed are positive statements by Bestuzhev that he looked on literature as a tool in the struggle with despotism. As a starting-point we can take his assurance -

According to the inclination of the age, I belonged above all to History and Politics. *

as meaning that he put politics above literature in the order of things. In a letter to N. Polevoy he alluded to his literary works as being secondary to the task at hand, as being a mode of conducting the battle against tsardom:

I will tell you frankly that in the past I considered literature as a side-line, it seemed and still seems that I was born to feel rather than to speak, and to act rather than to think. **

In Road to The Town of Kuba of 1836, he indicates that it is vital to read between the lines, to see more in a story than is actually related on the surface, to connect the story with the author - which is equivalent to connecting fiction with ^{contemporary} reality:

Let them say whatever they like, but the book and its author are one and the same person, only in different bindings. Therefore however much the author might be worn threadbare by imitation, however much he might try to conceal himself deliberately, the real colour of his skin will somewhere show through the adopted whitening: somewhere he will utter the words of his soul. Catch him at such rays of sincerity and together with him you will catch a whole net of his contemporaries, with the cockleshells and plants of his country and of his time. *

There occurs a sudden digression in Sailor Nikitin, a tale of 1834, which asks the reader to think of Bestuzhev himself behind the characters he creates:

But who told you that I myself am less entertaining than Saveliy Nikitin? Do you know how many passions I have ground with my heart? or what wonderful patterns the world has coined on my imagination?

And if I chose to transcribe from my soul into everyday language my experiences, dreams and thoughts, you, you yourself, sir, would find these notes no less entertaining than the Notes of Trelawney or The Last Indiscretion of a Contemporary. **

In a letter to Nikolay and Mikhail Bestuzhev, dated the 21st. December, 1833. Bestuzhev evinced the identical concept of literary creation:

The book is the man; the creation is the reflection of the creator...
My tales can be the story of my thoughts. *

In his articles on literature, Bestuzhev subscribed to the notion that political conditions exerted strong influence over a literary work. Speaking of the ancient Russian chronicles, he affirmed:

but the calamities of the fatherland and its misty sky pour on them a kind of despondency. **

It is obviously the same sort of mist which Bestuzhev deplores as lying over the field of contemporary Russian literature. ***

Bestuzhev explicitly delineates the usage of literary meetings and societies as media for political debates:

Public readings in literary societies, arousing rivalry amongst young writers, develop in the public too taste for native literature. Often those who go there in order to look at the work of others or to show their own return home with new ideas and with a most useful inclination. ****

This attitude towards literary societies is especially significant when one considers that Zhukovsky was at this time objecting to the literary society Arzamas being used as a political debating society and was endeavouring to preserve its purely literary character as a society for the discussion of questions of aesthetics. The Decembrists, on the other hand, utilised every society - even the Bible Society at Kiev - for the purpose of political propaganda.

Bestuzhev declares that the person who does not concern himself with politics wastes his time on all sorts of nonsense:

Life inevitably demands movement, and the developing mind - action; it wishes to stir when it cannot fly, but unoccupied with politics, it is quite natural that its activity grasps at everything which comes its way, and as the sources of our mind are too petty for very important affairs, is it odd that it plunged into favouritism and gossip? *

Finally Bestuzhev defined the link between the political ferment in Western Europe and the development and tasks of literature, when he stated:

...the thunder of distant battles inspires the style of the author and arouses the idle attention of readers;imagination, dissatisfied with reality, craves inventions, and under a political seal literature whirls in society. **

This patently signifies that authors are inspired by revolutions in the West, and imagination, hating the existing feudal system, desires the romantic form of depiction, whilst literature possesses social character and aims.

These comments will seem few and far between, but will be thought more relevant when taking into account Bestuzhev's literary criticism as part and parcel of the whole of Decembrist aesthetic judgments. Lastly it must be borne in mind that Bestuzhev's views on politics and literature, even if they here appear to be somewhat exaggerated out of all context, were very different from those of other poets of the Golden Age, such as Zhukovsky, Baratynsky, and Batyushkov. Although the latter wrote many nationalistic and patriotic poems and Baratynsky was even exiled to Finland for a short period, none of them can be contemplated as revolutionaries. They never belonged to any revolutionary movements, showed sympathy for liberal ideas, or saw literature as a vehicle for conveying social attitudes. In fact, they all tended in the opposite direction and rather belonged to the type of romanticism which treated such topics as nature, love, sorrow, death and the after-life. When seen in contrast with these other leading literary figures, Bestuzhev stands out all the more strongly as an adherent of the camp of political romanticism.

(b) Bestuzhev's literary criticism as part of Decembrist literary ideals.

It is now feasible to adopt the premise that Bestuzhev was closely and intrinsically involved in the Decembrist movement, and from this point de départ we can discuss his writings in the light of the Decembrist literary society of which he was a member. Bestuzhev joined the Free Society of the Lovers of Russian Literature, or the Republic of Letters as it was known, on the 15th. November, 1820,¹ and from that date onwards his fate became bound up with that of the society in both the literary and political spheres of activity. On examination of the works of the leading Decembrist writers, it is possible to deduce how Bestuzhev's aesthetic principles were formulated under the influence of the Republic of Letters and perhaps were themselves instrumental in developing Decembrist notions on the purpose of art.

Decembrist literature was conceived at a time when national liberation movements were sweeping Europe and spreading their contagious ideas to Russia. Pestel' wrote:

The spirit of reform sets minds everywhere aboil, so to speak.²

1. V. Bazanov, Uchenaya respublika, M - L, 1964. p 443.

~~2. Orlov, op. cit., p. 505.~~

2. Vl. Orlov, Dekabristy, M - L, 1951. p 505.

and Bestuzhev himself was constantly at pains to stress the enthusiasm with which his generation greeted news of revolutionary events and ideas from Western Europe. In such a political climate, it was perhaps inevitable that the Decembrists should wish to convey by literary means the social cataclysm that was taking place.

What exactly were the social aims of literature? The answer to this question involves the whole kaleidoscope of Decembrist ideals. Basically the Decembrists believed that literature had to be harnessed to the politics of the day, was a tool in the national liberation struggle, in other words, theirs was a principle of littérature engagée. This entailed numerous attitudes and opinions on literature, which went towards composing the entire Decembrist aesthetic fabric.

Decembrist literature originated in the Great Patriotic War of 1812, when the Russian people ejected the French armies from Russia and freed Europe from the yoke of Napoleonic despotism. The Decembrists were extremely proud of the collective achievement of the Russian people, and F.N. Glinka lavished laudatory phrases on the Russian soldiers,

who distinguished themselves not simply by momentary accesses of bravery, but by constant courage, steadfastness of spirit, and uncomplaining patience. ¹

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 313.

It is little wonder, therefore, if Decembrist officers returning from the campaign abroad were deeply shocked at the maltreatment handed out to these same heroes, who had risked their lives for Russia. Bestuzhev bore witness to the grumbling of the people, who lamented:

We shed our blood, but again they compel us toil at the corvée.
We saved our father land from the tyrant, but again lords
tyrannise over us. *

Moreover, the Great Patriotic War aroused in the Russian people lofty patriotic enthusiasm and a passionate aspiration for freedom. Bestuzhev explained:

Napoleon invaded Russia, and then the Russian people for the first time became aware of its strength; then there awoke in all hearts a feeling of independence, at first political, and subsequently national too. This was the beginning of free thought in Russia. **

Proceeding from the War of 1812, comes therefore political consciousness. Rayevsky's Message to G.S. Baten'kov is a clear example of the connection he described between the war and the commencement of consciousness within himself:

When over my native land
The lightning flashed out of a cloud,
When Moscow suffered in chains
Amidst murder and fires,
When with fatal hand
War dealt death and fear
And spilled blood like a river
On my dear country's fields,
Then in my free soul
I recognised bonds for the first time
And, seeing the people's voice of sorrow,
I trembled with sympathy..... 1

And now this political consciousness was to be enunciated in literature in all its varying overtones. Bestuzhev emphasised the importance of the link between literature and national crises in his article "A Look at Russian Literature During 1823" :

Then the words "fatherland" and "glory" electrified everyone. Every leaflet bearing something patriotic flew from hand to hand with delight. Songs of praise, whether good or bad, rang

1. V. Rayevsky, Stikhotvoreniya, L - 1952, p 103.

out in the streets and were applauded in the salons; in a word, everything at that time seemed beautiful, because everything was true. But the political storm abated; enthusiasm too died away. *

It has already been indicated how Bestuzhev employed literature as a commentary on political affairs.

The first Decembrist aesthetic value was, therefore, the political content of literature. Under this heading we have all the principles which the Decembrists considered as belonging to politics. Before any advance could be made, the people were to be educated, since, as Ryleyev asserted,

The ignorance of peoples is the mother and father of despotism, is the true and chief cause of all the violence and crime which have ever been perpetrated in the world. ¹

Enlightenment was thus the basis for a logical structure of society, and Ryleyev claimed that "Only despotism fears enlightenment, for it knows that its best support is ignorance". ² The cultural

1. I.M. Semenko, "Poeticheskoye naslediyе dekabristov" in Poety-Dekabristy, (Biblioteka poeta, Malaya seriya), introduced and annotated by I.M. Semenko. L - 1960, p 8.

2. Ibid.

inheritance shared by all the Decembrists was that of eighteenth-century enlightenment, and hence the code of the Union of Welfare allotted it a special category. A department was assigned to spread knowledge, and each member of the Union of Welfare was encouraged to "incline their young acquaintances to useful occupations, to establish societies with them or among them, to amuse them with varied subjects, but in such a way that the consequence of all occupations, actions and thoughts should be the general welfare". ¹

Bestuzhev too felt the pressing necessity for education; in his "Look at Old and New Literature in Russia", he outlined the factors hindering the development of contemporary Russian literature - the vastness of the empire was an obstacle to concentration of opinions and retarded the development of taste in the public; the universities, schools and institutes of learning were insufficient to cope with the size of the population; there was a lack of good teachers; many nobles were possessed of a feudal attitude, scornful, and negligent as regards their children's education; young men in the capitals were careless and obsessed with trivialities; no one devoted themselves to the profitless trade of writing, and those who did so, were mediocre dilettantes; the rich were not learned, and the scholars were poor; "the poet, the romantic, the scholar sees his work perishing in the bookshop and silence meeting him in society instead of rewards, he hears only mockery"; and finally, the fact that the Russian language has been banished

1. ~~Shchipanov, op. cit., p. 266.~~

1. Izbrannyye sotsial'no - politicheskiye i filosofskiyе proizvedeniya dekabristov. ed. I.Y. Shchipanov, 1951, vol. I. p. 266.
~~Shchipanov, op. cit., p. 266.~~

from society and the fair sex is indifferent to everything written in Russian. *

All these reflections lead to a single conclusion: ignorance, so rife and pernicious, must be uprooted if the Russian people were to achieve their ends.

Enlightenment meant for the Decembrists above all the cultivation of taste in the reading public. The code of the Union of Welfare spoke of "the elegant arts giving a suitable trend, consisting not in delicacy of feelings, but in the strengthening, ennobling and exalting of our moral being".¹ In rectifying man's moral fibre, the Decembrists thought it possible to alter society. Bestuzhev always thought that people had to be taught taste for the elegant. **

The primary essence of Decembrist literature consisted in the national independence of its character. Pride in the accomplishments of the Russian people generated the aspiration to create a purely Russian literature which was ^{not} imitative, which was not a mere copy of foreign models, a literature that dealt exclusively with Russian history, folk-lore and contemporary problems, and that was written in the Russian tongue. The formula of national spirit was thereby

1. Shchepanov, op. cit., p 271.

evolved, and the code of the Union of Welfare urged its members "to reveal all the absurd attachment to that which is foreign and the evil consequences ensuing therefrom".¹ and with reference to the education of youth "to avoid as much as possible that which is foreign, so that not the slightest inclination for the foreign should darken the sacred feeling of love for the fatherland".² Bestuzhev was among the foremost protagonists of the ideal of national spirit in literature, and constantly attacked imitativeness of any kind. In his "Look at Russian Literature during 1824 and the Beginning of 1825", he complained bitterly:

We imbibed with our milk lack of national spirit and admiration for only the foreign. Measuring our own works by the gigantic yardstick of foreign geniuses, our own insignificance from on high seems still smaller to us, and this feeling, unwarmed by national pride, instead of arousing the zeal to create what we do not have, tries to humiliate even what we do have". *

1. Shechipanov, op. cit., p 266.

2. Ibid. p 268.

Many years later Bestuzhev still stressed the intense abhorrence he felt at the neglect of national content and the adherence to Western European literature, when he proclaimed in a letter to Polevoy of the 23rd. April, 1831 :

I ardently hated German cosmopolitanism, which killed off every noble feeling of patriotism and nationalism. *

Bestuzhev's views were fully in line with the Decembrist understanding of national art; Kückhelbecker, for instance, in his article "On The Trend of Our Poetry, especially Lyric, in the Last Decade", pronounced:

Let holy Russia not only in the civil, but also in the moral world, be the first power in the universe! The faith of our ancestors, the customs of our fatherland, the national manuscripts, songs and legends - are the best, purest, and truest sources for our literature. ¹

Bestuzhev expressed precisely the identical concept of reliance on national sources, when he called on writers to study the antiquities of Russian literature -

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 553.

the ancient manuscripts such as The Lay of Igor's Host,
The Chronicle of Nestor, Russkaya Pravda, and The Song of
the Battle on the Don - " so as to find in them traits of the
Russian people and thereby give a true physiognomy to the
language". *

He averred elsewhere:

I shall not abandon the language of my ancestors, in which they
rejoiced and grieved, sang and deliberated. **

Using the measure of national spirit to judge the work of writers, in
his critical reviews Bestuzhev produced much criticism that was
erroneous and at times even ludicrous. He attacked Karamzin unfairly,
after originally admiring his writing, in an outburst which demonstrated
Bestuzhev's aversion to the restricted and imitative nature of
sentimentalist literature, calling Karamzin a hateful "old woman.....
an eloquent, industrious, trifling windbag, hiding his own insignificance
under the ballyhoo of other people's maxims who wrote his history
page after page, without thinking of the future and without consulting
the past". *** Bestuzhev also revised his opinion of Zhukovsky
and became one of the latter's bitterest detractors after
formerly venerating his achievements in the field of poetry.

In his article "On N. Polevoy's Novel An Oath at the Lord's Grave," he said caustically of Zhukovsky,

captivated by the pure dreaminess of Schiller and the legends of German antiquity, he transplanted romanticism into the virgin soil of Russian literature. But he transplanted only one of its flowers, a single one from its boundless nature. Russia was still echoing with the melancholy refrains of Zhukovsky, there still floated before our eyes the misty images of his poetry, hearts were still warmed by his ethereal love and his rapturous unworldly hopes*

Zhukovsky's poetry was too vague and indeterminate, too mystic and redolent of German influences. In his celebrated epigram on Zhukovsky, written as early as 1824, Bestuzhev remarked sarcastically:

From a shroud he has ^{dressed} ~~changed~~ himself in livery,
He has exchanged his laurel wreath for powder. **

In a letter to Pushkin, dated the 12th. February, 1825, Ryleyev and Bestuzhev explained the reasons for their dissatisfaction with the poetry

of Zhukovsky:

....this influence was too pernicious: the mysticism, with which the greater part of his poems are imbued, the dreaminess, vagueness, and a sort of mistiness, which are sometimes even charming in him, have corrupted many and have done much harm. ¹

In his reply to this attack of Zhukovsky, Pushkin showed himself to be more just:

Why should we bite the breasts of our wetnurse? Just because we have cut our teeth? ²

Bestuzhev's obsession with the presence of national spirit in literature led him to a misguided judgment on Pushkin's Yevgeniy Onegin. Pushkin's early work contained courage, originality, "witty, bold, fiery thoughts", harmony and musicality, and miraculous descriptions of nature in the Caucasus. * and yet Bestuzhev found cause to disagree violently with Pushkin's artistic content in Yevgeniy Onegin, which for him was nothing else but Pushkin's betrayal of romanticism. (Romanticism was the literary

1. A. S. Pushkin, Sochineniya, 1937 - 1949, vol. 13, pp 141 - 142.

2. Ibid. p 135.

mode adapted by the Decembrists to correspond to their own ideas, but Decembrism cannot be equated to Romanticism. It was rather ^{one of the branches} ~~an offshoot~~ of Romanticism). Bestuzhev reproached Pushkin with the rhetorical question:

Why should you shoot at a butterfly from a cannon?

in his letter of the 9th. March, 1825, * and affirmed that only in the lyrical digressions of the first chapter "everywhere where feeling speaks, where dream bears the poet away from the prose of the society he describes, do the verses burn with poetic fire and flow more resonantly into the soul". **

He pours scorn particularly on Karamzin and Zhukovsky, when he cries despairingly:

There was a time when we irrelevantly sighed in the manner of Sterne, then were courteous in French style, and now flew off to the ends of the earth in German fashion. When will we follow our own track? When will we write directly in Russian? God knows! Hitherto, at least, our muse remains the invisible bride. ***

In spite of his far-fetched recriminations, nevertheless Bestuzhev's criteria of literary analysis enabled him to deduce some sensible evaluations of Russian and W. European writers. In so doing, he considered that he was bringing criticism into the battle for nationalism in literature and thus using it as an influential tool in literary debates. In Journey to Reval, he stated explicitly:

Criticism, like the beneficent Nile with its flood, destroys harmful insects, refreshes the atmosphere of taste, and helps young plants to bear fruit, leaving on the fields of literature a golden sand Criticism was and will be the corner-stone of literature. * *and A.*

Bestuzhev therefore showers praise on the writers he deems as nationalistic and independent. Fonvizin "to the highest degree was able to capture the traits of national spirit"; *** Derzhavin "inspired, inimitable discovered the art of telling the truth smilingly to tsars, revealed the secret of elevating souls, capturing hearts, and attracting them now by outpourings of emotions, now by boldness of expressions, now by splendour of descriptions". *** Krylov "raised the Russian fable into an original classic form of value. It is impossible to give greater simplicity to a

story, greater national spirit to the language " * Bestuzhev treats the nearest colleagues of the Decembrists in poetry - Vyazemsky, Gnedich, Baratynsky and Milonov, as well as the Decembrist poets themselves - Ryleyev, Kückelbecker, Davydov and Glinka, from the subjective viewpoint, and creates a panegyric to their work. ** He refers to the Russian theatre as a "barren field", *** because fundamentally in Russia "there does not exist a national tragedy". **** This assumption of the foremost necessity of national spirit in literature was ably illustrated by Bestuzhev in his critical maxim:

Characters and incidents pass by, but nations and elements last forever! *****

It is when we examine Bestuzhev's own work on the background of the ethic he preached that we realise how miserably he fulfilled the aims he set for others. Belinsky pointed out that Bestuzhev's so-called Russian tales, derived from Russian antiquity, contained Russian speech, Russian customs and beliefs and numerous references to Russian history. But these tales lacked Russian character and were devoid of any Russian soul. The same applies to the Livonian tales, in which the German knights and ladies in no way differed from their Novgorodian equivalents. All too obvious are

the poverty of inventiveness, the amazing monotony in manner of narration, the extraordinary similarity in the characters, and above all the repetitious sameness in their monologues. ¹

Instead of the national tales one might expect from the pen of Bestuzhev, we get a veneer of Russian reality on the historical, geographical, and human plane but an abundance of ultra-romanticism, which manifests itself in heroes who suffer intense and drastic accesses of passion, shudder convulsively, grind their teeth, laugh wildly, and so on; ^{We find} ~~in~~ settings of Gothic mystery and horror and events of exaggerated cruelty and violence; ^{We meet with} ~~in~~ a style both intricate and vague, overburdened with exclamation marks, question marks, extraordinary metaphors, images and comparisons - all of which are encountered at every step, innumerable, unnecessary and wearisome to the reader. The final result was that Bestuzhev-Marlinsky became the by-word for pseudo-romanticism; his type of writing left itself open to satire and Grushnitsky in Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time is plainly a parody on the heroes of Bestuzhev.

From the political point of view, Bestuzhev's stories might well have succeeded in their goal, but ~~from~~ the aesthetic standpoint they failed in

1. V. G. Belinsky, Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy, M - 1953 - 1956, vol. 4, p 50.

the ultimate analysis; this was a general pronounced shortcoming in Decembrist literature: however hard the Decembrists endeavoured to unite literature and politics, the latter usually marred the outcome by hampering the creation of a truly outstanding artistic achievement. (This is not to gainsay the argument that the Decembrists simply never produced a writer of genius, of international stature - one who could bear the onus of fusing literature and politics.)

Under the banner of national spirit in literature was heralded patriotism; the Decembrists were fervid patriots, convinced of the greatness of Russia, of the lofty spiritual qualities of the Russian people, of the natural right of this people to a sensible and free social structure. They loved their land so passionately that everything connected with its countryside and life receives in Decembrist writing, particularly in lyric poetry, a highly emotional appraisal. In Glinka's Dream of a Russian Abroad, written during the foreign campaign, the sleeping warrior perceives:

vales

In the holiday apparel of spring

And rural pictures

Of the cherished Russian land. ¹

With lyrical emotion and love he speaks of young firs, which grow green in the native land, of the scent of birches, of the bell of the dashing troika,

1. F. Glinka, Stikhotvoreniya. L - 1951, p 123.

and of the sad song of the coachman. But now "the sweet dream" has disappeared:

a foreign picture

Shone luxuriantly before me.

A German town full of beauty;

But I pondered silently

And sighed for my native land. ¹

One of Ryleyev's early poems, Love for the Fatherland, 1813, began with an enthusiastic extollation of patriotism:

Where do they not raise altars

Of sacred love for the fatherland?

And where do they not consider it their duty

To nourish this sacred flame in blood?

No, no, this flame of sacred love

Burns equally in hearts everywhere. ²

Rayevsky's forceful oratorical prose summed up the Decembrist ethic of patriotism and he reached peaks of eloquence as he exclaims:

1. Glinka, op. cit., p 124.

2. Shchipanov, op. cit., p 519.

But patriotism, that torch of civil life, that mysterious power,
guides me, Can I behold the enslavement of a nation, of my
fellow-citizens, the sorrowful chasubles of the sons of the
fatherland, the general murmur, fear and tears of the weak, the
passionate indignation and bitterness of the strong - and not
feel compassion for them? O Brutus! O Washington! I will not
abase myself, I will not be a feeble, soulless slave - otherwise
let my friends pronounce my name with scorn! ¹

Pushkin gave an admirable depiction of the ideal Decembrist patriot
in the person of Nikolay Turgenev:

Having eyes for Russia alone in the world,
Pursuing his ideal,
The lame Turgenev heeded them (i.e. The Decembrists)
And, loathing the scourge of slavery,
Envisaged in this crowd of nobles
The liberators of the peasants ²

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 475.

2. A.S. Pushkin, Yevgeniy Onegin. M - 1960, p 253. (~~This is from the 10th.~~
chapter)
ch. X stanza XV.

Bestuzhev too experienced this love of his country and was uplifted to heights of patriotic fervour in ^{many of} ~~and~~ the facets of his writing. Glorification of the fatherland is the quintessence of his thought:

How many men who could have glorified their country in deed or word perish, their souls dozing in the whirlpool of fashionable insignificance, and appear momentarily on earth like the fleeting shadow of a cloud. *

In Neuhausen Castle, he asks,

who does not listen with delight to news of his fatherland as if to the song of a bird of paradise? **

and the whole of Roman and Olga is a eulogy of Roman's patriotic ideals. In The Traitor¹ Vladimir Sitsky cries unbelievably:

"Has a Russian suggested to a Russian that he betray his country, become a traitor to his fatherland?" ***

and the story itself begins with Sitsky's meditations as he gazes on his homeland:

1. The Traitor first appeared in the Polar Star for 1825.

" O my land, my sacred native land! Which heart on earth would not throb on seeing you? Which icy soul would not melt upon breathing your air? " ^{**}

In a poem dated 1818, the young hero describes how the thought of his country inspires him in battles. ^{**} In fact Bestuzhev's literary works are all caught up in the web of patriotism, are impregnated with the incessant reminder of love for Russia, and comply in full with Decembrist requisites on this topic.

Accompanying the ideas of nationalism and patriotism was that of self-sacrifice. If a person loved his country and all its institutions, if he desired its improvement in any sense whatsoever, he must be ready to die for its sake whenever the occasion presented itself and urge others to do so. Ryleyev was perpetually exhorting his fellow-conspirators to be prepared for death and die valiantly, and Nikolay Bestuzhev relates how Ryleyev flung himself on his neck and said:

"And so, God be with us! Our fate is decided! All obstacles are, of course, now added to our doubts. But we shall begin. I am sure we shall die, but the example will remain. We shall sacrifice ourselves for the future freedom of our country." ¹

1. Vo spominaniya Bestuzhevyykh, p 34.

and how he assured his mother in a moving scene:

" I shall shed my blood, but for the freedom of my country, for the happiness of my fellow-countrymen, for the wrenching of the iron sceptre from the hands of the autocracy, for the acquisition of lawful rights for oppressed humanity,..... If I fall in the struggle..... if my contemporaries will fail to understand and appraise me- you will know the purity and sanctity of my intentions; perhaps, posterity will render me justice, and history will write my name together with the names of great men who have died for mankind. " ¹

Decembrist literature is permeated by this theme of self-sacrifice - the highest zenith any man can attain to. Odoyevsky wrote in his Crossing from Chita:

For holy Russia captivity and execution
Are a joy and a glory.
We will cheerfully lie down (in the grave)
For holy Russia. ²

and he had previously proved himself capable of incarnating this

1. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevskh, p 10.

2. A.I. Odoyevsky, Polnoye sobraniye stikhotvoreniy i pisem, M- L, 1934, p 190.

culminatory degree of patriotism when he was heard to declare prior to the uprising of 1825:

" We shall die; but what a glorious death it will be. " ¹

Ryleyev praised undaunted courage on behalf of one's country even in the face of death:

Well I know; death awaits

The man who first rebels

Against the oppressors of the people;

.....When was

Freedom bought without sacrifices ?

I shall die for my native land. ²

and gave as example Russian heroes who had braved death, comparing them with the legendary heroes of classical antiquity, in his already cited Love for the Fatherland:

But Roman and Greek heroes

In candid love for the fatherland

Were eclipsed by Russians in peace and battles

In bygone days. ³

1. Vosstaniye dekabristov, vol. 1, p 448

2. K.F. Ryleyev, Stikhotvoreniya, stat'i, Ocherki, zapiski, pis'ma, M - 1956,

pp. 214 - 215.

3. Shchipanov, op.cit. , p 520.

Bestuzhev likewise propagates the supreme ideal of self-sacrifice throughout his stories, poems and articles. In The Traitor the statement:

"Enviably is death for one's country, and honourable will be the burial of the brave by the brave," *

stands out conspicuously as a Decembrist proclamation. The hero of Mikhail Tverskov explains to his son that he will "at the price of his head Purchase peace for the fatherland." **

The Exploit of Ovechkin and Shcherbina in the Caucasus, written in 1825, is an example of the gallantry of Russians in the face of death. Shcherbina dies:

Thus he ended his life, the model and sacrifice of bravery.... a youth who had given rise to shining hopes with his education, intelligence, and steadfastness of spirit! But his blood had been shed for his country - not in vain; it had inscribed a new paragraph in the annals of the military glory of the Russian people. ***

Ovechkin refuses to surrender despite overwhelming odds, and his ultimate triumph is welcomed by Bestuzhev:

Let this lofty exploit of Ovechkin live in the memory of Russians, in the gratitude of the fatherland, as an example to its future defenders. ****

Bestuzhev confirmed the readiness of the Decembrist nobles to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the people without permitting the people to take part in the insurrection and risk their lives, when he informed the Investigatory Committee:

Most of all we feared a revolution of the people, for it could not fail to be bloody and long-drawn-out. *

Inextricably linked with the principle of self-sacrifice was the civil hero, the central dominant character in Decembrist literature. Herein lies one of the inherent weaknesses of Decembrist literature, especially in regard to Bestuzhev's heroes. The latter are civil heroes, who become wooden characters, bereft of psychological motivation, prominent figures moving like puppets on a Mediaeval tapes try, the mouthpieces of the author, pronouncing monologues replete with Decembrist overtones, behaving like the heroes of Corneille, torn between love and honour, between personal happiness and death for the fatherland. The attempt to instil in his heroes the motives of national pride, patriotism and self-sacrifice, caused Bestuzhev to produce melodramatic characters, who seem like apparitions of misconstrued Byronism or unintentional parodies of Hugo. Instead of naturalness and realistic conduct, we get ultra-romanticism, saturated with powerful passions of exaggerated love, griefs and joys, and an abundance of false and inflated metaphors. ¹

1. See ^{R.V.} Ivanov-Razumnik, Istoriya russkov obshchestvennoy mysli, SPb, 1911,

Most typical of all the heroes of Bestuzhev was Roman Yasenskiy, who has selflessly sacrificed his blood and youth for his fatherland, * who utters speeches reminiscent of a liberal of the 1820's, who refuses to sell his country even for all the treasures in the world, and awaits death for his country with pride and consolation. ** The robber Berkut, who places his native land above all else, is likewise simply an embodiment of values, a larger-than-life, towering personage. When Bestuzhev restricts his portraits, however, in his poems, the result is far more satisfactory. The heroes of Near the Camp and Mikhail Tverskoy are far more expressive in their simple formulas than all the other bombastic types. In the first poem, the youth announces the Decembrist dogma of self-sacrifice in the single line:

" Tell her I fe ll for my fatherland." ***

And Mikhail Tverskoy paints a succinct portrait of a hero about to be executed for the sake of his country. ****

At this stage, it will be noted That Decembrist thematics follow a clearly defined line. The reason for this phenomenon is easily explained by having recourse to a scrutiny of the Decembrist outlook on the content of literature. The real and solitary purpose of literature, was, according

to the Decembrists, to attract people to good, and hence literature was to contain lofty feelings. In the code of the Union of Welfare, writers were urged

to set the seal of elegance on their works, without losing sight of the fact that the truly elegant is everything which arouses in us lofty feelings attracting us to good. ¹

Further ,

the strength and charm of poetry does not consist in harmony of words, or high-flown thoughts, or incomprehensibility of exposition, but in vividness of descriptions, elegance of expressions, and above all the unfeigned expounding of lofty feelings which attract one to good. ²

Ryleyev asserted in his article "Some Thoughts on Poetry":

We shall employ all our efforts to realise in our writings the ideals of lofty feelings, thoughts and eternal truths, always close to mankind and not always sufficiently known to it, ³

1. Shchipanov, op. cit., p 270.

2. Ibid.

3. Orlov, op. cit., p 559

and promised in his poem To Bestuzhev:

My soul will preserve to the grave

The burning courage of lofty thoughts. ¹

Küchelbecker mentioned "The sacred mysteries of lofty art", ² and Rayevsky Griboyedov, Pushkin and Glinka all paid tribute to the importance of lofty passions, lofty impulses of the soul, lofty aspirations of thoughts, lofty freedom of the soul, and creative, lofty, beautiful arts. The afore-mentioned code precluded the possibility of any other type of poetry, asseverating:

The description of an object or the expressing of a feeling which does not arouse but only weakens lofty reflections, however charming it might be, is always unworthy of the gift of enlightened poetry. ³

Thus the notion of seriousness was commingled with the notion of loftiness, and loftiness became a synonym for significance of content. Küchelbecker fought not only for lofty themes but also for lofty genres, defending the ode and attacking the elegy. Küchelbecker, like Ryleyev and Bestuzhev, condemned the school of Karamzin and Zhukovsky for insignificance of content. From the specific position of Decembrist aesthetics, the

1. Ryleyev, op. cit., p 64.

2. Orlov, op. cit., p 103.

3. Shchipanov, op. cit., p 270.

simplicity of Pushkin's narrative in Yevgeniy Onegin was understood as ideological paucity. Continuing his argument with the school of Zhukovsky on what was to be the chief content of poetry, the "general" or the "personal", Kūchelbecker advocated the civil ode as the best mode of poetic expression:

In the ode the poet is unselfish: he does not delight in the insignificant events of his own life, he does not lament over them; he proclaims the truth and justice of Providence, exults over the grandeur of his native land, kneads Perouns into enemies, blesses the righteous, curses the monster.¹

The concentration of Zhukovsky's poetry on the inner life was comprehended by the Decembrists as egoistic limitedness. This was unjust, since Zhukovsky laid the foundation of Russian psychological lyric poetry, and yet it was very understandable at a time of revolutionary upheaval.

Rayevsky, in To Friends in Kishinev, addressed Pushkin with an exhortation to concentrate on important themes and abandon personal considerations:

Leave love to other poets!

Or sing of love, where blood spurts out,

Where a foreign tribe smilingly

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 550.

Tortures us with bloody anguish,
Where words, thoughts and involuntary glances
Attract like an open plot,
Like a crime, to the executioner's block,
And where the people, subject to fear,
Does not dare to grumble even in a whisper.¹

Bestuzhev himself always had a great deal to say on the content of literature. He systematically eulogised those works that were full of "lofty feelings", such as Ryleyev's Meditations^{*} and he saw in Gredich "a fiery soul accessible to everything lofty".^{**} He approved of the morality in Glinka's poetry and of the patriotic content of his prose. He passed slighting comment on Karamzin's verses:

they draw an involuntary sigh from a maiden's heart and a tear
from those who have experienced everything,^{***}

And heaped contempt on the Karamzinian sentimentalists - Neledinsky - Meletsky, Count Saltykov, Prince Shalikov, Podshivalov, P. Sumarokov and A. Izmaylov, treating them with the irony they deserved because of their untalented efforts. In an early poem, To Several Poets, Bestuzhev viciously satirised ungifted poets, accusing them of artificial taste, ignorance, imitativeness, triviality, and failure to recognise genuine artistry.^{****} Bestuzhev praised even his enemy, Admiral Shishkov,

1. Rayevsky, op. cit., p 149.

because he "strongly and justly rebelled" against these "tearful half-Russian Jeremiahs". * Bestuzhev judged The Lay of Igor's Host to be the model of the lofty concept of poetry, a classic of Russian eloquence, by very reason of its content:

The anonymous bard breathed the Russian military soul into a youthful language - yet attractive by virtue of its very strangeness; he adorned it with the flowers of a dream, the invention of a national mythology, striking comparisons, and deep feelings. The inflexible, glory-loving spirit of the people breathes in every line. **

He greeted Griboyedov's Woe From Wit with joyous acclamation professing it to be "a phenomenon of the sort we have not seen since The Minor. A host of characters, portrayed boldly and sharply; a vivid picture of Muscovite manners, soul in feelings, intelligence and wit in conversation, a hitherto unparalleled fluency and naturalness of Russian conversational speech in verse. All this attracts, strikes and rivets one's attention. A man with a heart could not read it without laughing and being moved to tears". *** Even a perfunctory glance at Woe From Wit serves as a reminder that the play answered to the sympathies of Decembrists at every turn, and that the hero, Chatsky, is simply a Decembrist -

irrepressible and loquacious, eternally indignant and invincibly cheerful, unweariedly thoughtful, perspicacious and adamant in his condemnation of frivolous society. Bestuzhev, in harmony with Decembrist ideas on the loftiness of artistic content, rebuked Pushkin for wasting his time on the creation of a fashionable dandy in the person of Onegin and assured him:

I involuntarily give precedence to that which stirs the soul,
exalts it, and touches the Russian heart. *

Of course the question of the lofty content of literature and its purpose in society could not be resolved without contemplating the role of the poet himself. Literature for the Decembrists was a tribune from which they could force the inattentive world to heed the cry of their ~~and~~ indignation and conscience, and at the immediate centre of the Decembrist aesthetic was focussed the mission of the poet - to doctor, correct, preach, serve civil affairs and lofty designs, and above all be able to sacrifice himself in the name of the doctrines he promulgates. Küchelbecker's "On the Trend of our Poetry" condemned languorous dreamers and careless Epicureans, who are unworthy of the appellation "lyric poet". The true poet is an avenger for transgressed ideals, a public orator, a bearer of noble truths; he is a prophet,

a teacher, a warrior. Ryleyev construed the role of the poet in the same way, confessing:

I am not a poet, but a citizen, ¹

and formulated this concept in his poem, Derzhavin; the duty of the poet is to be

The organ of sacred truth

In his native land. ²

The poet is the highest example of heroism and dedication to his country and his people; he is

Everywhere the singer of the people's good,

Everywhere the defender of the persecuted,

And the irreconcilable enemy of evil. ³

To the poet

base fear is unknown;

He looks on death with scorn,

And sets alight prowess in young hearts

With his truthful verse. ⁴

1. Ryleyev, op. cit., p 168.

2. Ibid. p 151.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

That is why, Ryleyev affirmed,

there is nothing higher than the destiny of a poet.¹

This role of the poet singled him out as a national leader and revolutionary, and throughout the work of Kückhelbecker passes the image of the poet as prophet and citizen. In Poets of 1820, he begins by telling of the struggle of "villains and fools" against "lofty deeds and verses", and he complains that

The screech-owls have driven off the eagles everywhere,²

meaning by "eagles" the civil poets. He describes the power of the poetic word, immediately linking the work of the poet with the battle for freedom:

In the stern hand of Juvenal

The dreadful scourge whistles at villains

And drives the colour from their cheeks, -

And the power of tyrants trembled.³

The lines on the "union of poets" ring like an oath to fearless faithfulness.

1. Ryleyev, op. cit., p 151.

2. V.K. Kückhelbecker, Izbrannyye Proizvedeniya, L - 1959, p 92.

3. Ibid. p 96.

what of persecution?

Immortality is alike the lot

Of bold, inspired deeds

And mellifluous poetry!

Yes! Our union too shall not die,

Free, joyful and proud,

Firm both in happiness and misfortune,

The union of the favourites of the eternal muses. ¹

In his To ApP. Yermolov, written because of rumours that Yermolov would command the troops to aid Greece against the Turkish rulers, Kúchelbecker allots to the poets the right of judgment and sentence, grants them the highest possible place in society:

The people believe in poets.

The momentary possessor of the throne,

The tsar, is not positioned above them. ²

The role of the poet was thus functional - he was the herald of truth, the prognosticator of doom for the oppressor, the scourge of despotism. Pushkin's The Prophet and Griboyedov's David were impressed with this

1. Kúchelbecker, op. cit., p 98.

2. Ibid. p 115

biblical image of the poet as prophet. The Decembrists gave numerous concrete instances of this ideal; they looked upon Derzhavin as such a civil poet, Ryleyev lauding him in the following terms of approbation:

He sang of holy Russia and glorified it!

He placed the social good

Highest of all the goods in the world

And in his fiery verses

He praised sacred virtue. ¹

Bestuzhev also was not slow to admire Derzhavin for his courage in telling the truth to tsars. *

Byron earned equal respect among the Decembrists. For Tumansky and Somov, Byron was not an unprincipled individualist but an exposé of evil, whose poetry was most unflattering in its condemnation. ² For Ryleyev too Byron was a civil poet, an orator, a publicist, a satirist, the poet of strength and freedom. In his On The Death of Byron, he wrote:

Only tyrants and slaves

Are glad at his sudden death. ³

Bestuzhev mourned Byron's death in the same manner. In a letter to Vyazemsky of the 17th. June, 1824:

1. Ryleyev, op. cit., p 151.

2. Bazanov, Ocherki dekabristskoy literatury. M - 1953, p 220.

3. Ryleyev, op. cit., p. 60.

We have lost a brother in Byron, humanity its champion, literature its Homer of ideas, *

and constantly referred to Byron with the utmost deference, regarding him as the perfect specimen of the poet. Speaking of both Alfieri and Byron, he named them as the epitome of self-sacrifice, since "they proudly cast off the golden chains of fortune, scorned all the allurements of high society". **

Bestuzhev even claims that the best and most courageous poetry is created in adverse conditions and that the poet is inspired only if he has to make certain sacrifices in order to achieve his objectives.

Encouragement can develop only commonplace talents: the fire of the hearth requires brushwood and bellows in order to burn - but when did lightning demand man's assistance in order to flare up and soar in the sky!Geniuses of all ages and peoples, I call on you!

exclaimed Bestuzhev.

I see in the pallor of your faces, emaciated by persecution or want, the bloom of immortality! Sorrow is the germ of thoughts, solitude is their hearth. ***

As such examples of poets striving against poverty and hardship, Bestuzhev selects Tasso, Shakespeare, Molière, Voltaire and Homer. All the writers

whose names recur throughout Decembrist literature as symbols of valour and altruism are mounted on a pedestal - to be idolised and imitated. The traits of the heroic, romantic view of the poet appeared in 1823 in S.I. Murav'ev - Apostol's poem, written in French:

Je passerai sur cette terre,
Toujours rêveur et solitaire,
Sans que personne m'ait connu.
Ce n'est qu'au bout de ma carrière,
Que par un grand trait de lumière
On verra ce qu'on a perdu. ¹

Küchelbecker defined a wider conception of the word poet when he wrote:

Every unusual man, with powerful passions, who clears himself a path in the world, is already a poet, even if he has never written verses and even if he is illiterate. ²

Ryleyev was of the same opinion:

The man, in whose breast a whole world sometimes crowds,
A rapture of soul bears aloft from the earth;
Despite his enemies he is forever a poet,
He demands glory, he does not crave it. ³

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 187.

2. See B. Meylakh, "Literaturno-esteticheskaya programma dekabristov", in his Voprosy literatury i estetiki. L - 1958.

3. Ryleyev, op. cit., p 64.

In conclusion, Nikolay Bestuzhev explained the effect Ryleyev's poetry had on the contemporary generation, and on the more general plane the impression that any daring and independent poet would produce on his fellow-men:

surrounded by the spies of despotism, in the midst of slavish adulation, fearful flattery and cowardly servility, amid a whole empire groaning beneath the yoke of distressing arbitrariness, we suddenly heed the voice of a poet, proclaiming to us lofty truths - heard by us for the first time but familiar to our hearts. ¹

The poet was any man who could alleviate the sufferings of the masses by giving it hope, by making its torments universally known, by essaying to lead it out of the darkness of serfdom and ignorance into the light of liberty and knowledge. Freedom fighters such as Manuel and Riego were figureheads of Decembrist revolutionary propaganda.

The theme of freedom was preponderant in Decembrist literature; it was always to the fore and was the kernel of all Decembrist aspirations. Ryleyev wrote:

Alas! My country is suffering,
My soul, agitated by oppressive thoughts,
Now thirsts for only freedom. ²

1. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevskikh, p 25.

2. Shchepanov, op. cit., p 532.

P. A. Katenin composed a revolutionary hymn to freedom:

Our country is suffering
Beneath your yoke, O villain!
If despotism oppresses us,
We shall overthrow the throne and tsars.
Freedom! Freedom!
Reign over us!
Ah! It is better to die than to live as slaves -
This is the oath of each of us¹

Glinka in his Experiences of Two Tragic Events, (1817), put these words on the lips of an ancient hero, but they are obviously addressed to present-day Russia:

"Freedom! Fatherland! Sacred words!
Or will you always be an empty sound?"²

Even in Siberia the Decembrists eagerly caught the echoes of new freedom movements in the West - the July Revolution of 1830 in France, the Polish rising against Nicholas I - and were deeply inspired by this resurgence of spirit. Odoyevsky, in Answer to Pushkin's To Siberia,

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 88.

2. Glinka, op. cit., p 77.

ecstatically vowed:

We will forge swords out of our chains
And light the fire of freedom again.¹

The theme of freedom played an integral part in the work of Bestuzhev, who depicted in all his stories champions of the oppressed, warriors of freedom. Von Serrat in Wenden Castle takes the side of his suffering peasants and fights their cause; Vseslav and Andrey in Neuhausen Castle display matchless valour in ridding Estonia of the perfidious, homicidal Von Mey; Reginald in Eisen Castle redresses wrong, by murdering his brutal uncle in the name of the oppressed people; in Journey to Reval Bestuzhev outlines the freedom struggle of the Estonians against the innumerable invaders who ruled them implacably; Roman in Roman and Olga implores the Novgorodians to refuse to bow to the will of the Muscovy Princes and to preserve their sovereign independence; the ritual songs are merely a hymn of freedom, the first one declaiming with its resonant refrain:

Glory be to God in heaven, and to freedom on this earth!
Let not its justice be betrayed,
Nor its first friends grow old;
Let not their sabres and daggers grow rusty
Nor their good horses become worthless.
Glory be to God in heaven, and to freedom on this earth!²

1. Odoyevsky, op. cit., p 116.

2. M.P.Alekseyev and B.S. Meylakh, Dekabristy i ikh vremya, M - L, 1951, p 13.

Now the Decembrists were of the considered opinion that the best and most effective way to embody the thematics of nationalism, patriotism, self-sacrifice and love of freedom in literature without incurring the wrath of the authorities and censorship was to utilise history as a means of disguising the intent and purport of an artistic work. In addition the Decembrists regarded the past as a school for the present, especially valuing the heroism shown by Russians in the struggle against the Tartar invasion and in the battle of the Ukraine with the Polish gentry, and the republican exploits ~~as~~ of ancient Novgorod and Pskov. These epochs of the past and their participants were idealised in the poetry and prose of the Decembrists. Comprehension of the true and objective meaning of events and ideas of the past was by no means as important to them as the implementation of historical traditions in the interests of the present. Real historical method - the understanding of the unbiased character of historical events conforming to natural laws - was not yet perceived by the Decembrists. But patriotic pride, the yearning to emphasise the freedom-loving traditions of the Russian past, was the strong side of the Decembrist approach to history which contributed to the nourishing of revolutionary spirit.

In a variant of To Friends in Kishinev, Rayevsky besought Pushkin:

Sing of the simple customs of our forefathers,
The golden age of our fatherland,
The natural statutes of wild and sacred nature,
And of rights. ¹

In Ryleyev's Meditations, national antiquity was used as material for civil preaching. He states that he had a similar aim to Niemcewicz in writing his Meditations, "to remind youth of the exploits of their ancestors, to acquaint it with the brightest epochs of national history". ²

Bestuzhev said that Ryleyev "cleared a new path in Russian poetry, having chosen as his goal the awakening of the prowess of his fellow-citizens by recounting the exploits of their ancestors". * However, for the most part the Meditations were insufficiently historical, and Pushkin, aspiring to a fresh, realistic understanding of history reproached them for their lack of national and Russian spirit. In the Meditations, men of the 14th. century are in essence no different from men of the 18th. century - viz. Dimitry Donskoy, Volynsky, Derzhavin. At the same time it must be remembered that advances had been made from the content of 18th. century historical tragedies, as practised by Knyazhmin for instance. In the later Meditations, the locale, the background, the setting of the action, is rendered more concrete and

1. Semenکو, op. cit., p 32.

2. Orlov, op. cit., p 5.

historically exact. The landscape becomes an inherent part of historical narration, especially in Ivan Susanin, Yermak, Peter the Great in Ostrogozhsk. In Ryleyev's poems this tendency is still more profoundly felt; the romantic colouring, the couleur locale, is sharply augmented; Ukrainian customs and nature were exotically observed, and Ryleyev punctiliously created their specific, individualistic aspects, as in Voynarovskiy and The Confession of Nalivayko.

Everything that is true of Ryleyev's historical poems is true of Bestuzhev's historical tales. In the preface to Andrey, Prince of Pereyaslay, he said:

Like the gaze of love, or the promise of glory,

Sacred antiquity is alluring;

The deeds of our forebears are majestic,

- Their quiet life and menacing war!

Heeding its enchanting call

The soul vibrates, like a golden harp. *

He reiterates this sensation of enthrallment with historical narration, in Page from the Diary of a Guards Officer, when he claims that his imagination

loves to fly with fiery dream
In the mist of antiquity,
And now, abandoning decay,
She is re-animated with former life,
And the river of time flows back;
And again the native land can be perceived,
Populated with heroes. *

In a letter to Polevoy, he wrote:

I investigated considerably the romantic and material part of
Russian history. **

Knowledge of these aspects of history entailed the locality where the incident took place, details of life, customs, dress, armour, and so on. In his historical tales, Bestuzhev gave information of dates of battles, explanations of national holidays and habits, sketches of historical personages, and other material essential to the creation of atmosphere and his own interpretation of realistic presentation. But his characters do not necessarily fit in with the milieu he pictures; they could exist in any age, in any century, under any conditions, and still pronounce the same speeches, still behave in a heroic manner. They are not historical characters, who exist in their own right, but are all too patently the toys of the writer, manipulated at will.

History for Bestuzhev was to be adapted subjectively and he insists that Ryleyev's Meditations are pure romantic poetry, insofar as they comprise a national, historical subject in subjectively-lyrical treatment. The criterion is the interpretation of the author on some historical occurrence or person. * Bestuzhev's own historical adaptations are based on imagination and not on the reproduction of genuinely historical and archaeological details. Praising Polevoy's An Oath at the Lord's Grave, he wrote to him:

Let others burrow in manuscripts, testing them out - was it thus, could ~~it~~ have been thus, at the time of Shemyaka? I am sure, I am convinced, that it was thusin this my Russian heart, my imagination is a guarantee. What purpose has poetry if not to recreate the past and prophesy the future, if not to create always according to the image and likeness of truth! **

For Bestuzhev, truth in history, as in contemporary life, is subjective, is prompted by the heart and the imagination. Therefore history itself is not important to him, but historical decoration. The content of his historical tales serve only as a means for transmitting certain ideas. In spite of the countless shortcomings in Bestuzhev's tales, these tales had positive meaning in the 1820's since they contributed to the rapprochement of literature and life. Their weakness lies in the fact that

their progressive significance waned with the passing of time.

Decembrist literature was heralded under the banner of romanticism and the foregoing survey reveals that romanticism for the Decembrists was primarily content. They accepted the programme of romanticism as they considered it applicable for the propaganda of their ideas. They perfected and interpreted characteristic propositions of romanticism to suit their own political requirements, thereby lending romantic principles a progressive trend. For example, they reduced the romantic demand for originality of characters to an exhibition of exceptional standards of heroism, self-sacrifice, and devotion to country and ideals. This induced Bestuzhev to several ridiculous assumptions; blind to the movement of realism or realistic content while evaluating the work of Russian and foreign writers, he branded every appearance of independence and originality as a manifestation of romantic tendencies. For him, Rabelais, Rousseau, Shakespeare, Griboyedov and Krylov are romantics, and Pushkin's drift towards realism displeased him intensely. He spoke bitingly of the representatives of reactionary romanticism - Bulharyn, Grech, Senkowski and Zagoskin. Bulharyn "did not understand the spirit of the Russian people" * since he adhered to reactionary interpretations, and in his novel, Pyotr Vyzhigin, he wrote more about Napoleon than the real heroes - the Russians. ** His attack on Zagoskin is sardonic:

In a word, there is nothing outstanding or striking in him
but much that is amusing. *

In the second half of this analysis of aesthetic principles, we shall see Bestuzhev as the champion of romantic literature, deriving his views from Romanticism in the West and moulding them into a Decembrist shape, and vice-versa.

The Decembrists founded revolutionary romanticism, and a ~~general~~ general group of Decembrist romantic writers existed. In 1819, P.A. Vyazemsky wrote:

Fall, classicists, with your classical despotisms! The world is beginning to learn that people do not exist for tsars, but tsars for peoples; it is time for you too to learn that readers do not exist for writers, but writers for readers. ¹

In Russia of the first half of the 1820's romanticism was interpreted primarily as a literary revolution, the overthrow of formal canons which shackled the initiative of the artist, the repudiation of the obligatory instructions of the poetry of classicism. Pushkin held a similar opinion on romanticism, understanding it fundamentally as the freedom of creation - freedom from genres and compulsory norms. "I am writing motley stanzas of a romantic poem", Pushkin defined Yevgeniy Onegin, and for the same reason he considered Boris Godunov as a "truly romantic tragedy". ² Vyazemsky again stressed that romanticism "is subject only to the laws of nature and elegance, rejecting the constraint of conventional regulations". ³

1. Semenko, op. cit., p 28.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

a) Works that may be considered political and poetical.

Journal in Revel, written between 1820 and 1821, is essentially an Chapter V. a journey to Estonia in the manner of Sterne's Sentimental Journey and Karaulov's Letters of a Russian Traveller as well as the very followers of Karaulov's tradition such as R. Sverzhkov, V. Isaylov, M. Nevzorov, and Prince A. Shalikhov. However, on closer inspection it becomes apparent that Pastushov's journey is of a very different kind. Instead of the lyrical enthusiasm with nature and the constant unfoldings of tender feelings and pleasant or melancholy experiences indulged in by the sentimental travellers, in Pastushov's work we get a serious and painstaking attempt to review the position of the Estonians and Livonians under the rule of German, Swedish and Danish oppressors. Throughout his survey, moreover, Pastushov's sympathy with the people of Livonia is always in the forefront. The first letter from Revel is dated the 20th. December, 1820 and hence at a time when Pastushov's Decembrist aspirations were keen, since in October he had visited the rebellious Semenovskiy regiment and in November had been elected a member of the Decembrist Free Society of the Lovers of Russian Literature. Furthermore his translation from

2) Work.

a) Works that may be considered political and Decembrist.

Journey to Reval, written between 1820 and 1821, is ostensibly an account of a journey to Estonia in the manner of Sterne's Sentimental Journey and Karamzin's Letters of a Russian Traveller as well as the many followers of Karamzin's tradition such as P. Sumarokov, V. Izmaylov, M. Nevzorov, and Prince P. Shalikov. However, on closer inspection it becomes apparent that Bestuzhev's journey is of a very different kind. Instead of the lyrical enthusiasm with nature and the constant unfoldings of tender feelings and pleasant or melancholy experiences indulged in by the sentimental travellers, in Bestuzhev's work we get a serious and painstaking attempt to review the position of the Estonians and Livonians under the rule of German, Swedish and Danish oppressors. Throughout his survey, moreover, Bestuzhev's sympathy with the people of Livonia is always in the forefront. The first letter from Reval is dated the 20th. December, 1820 and hence at a time when Bestuzhev's Decembrist aspirations were keen, since in October he had visited the rebellious Semenovskiy regiment and in November had been elected a member of the Decembrist Free Society of the Lovers of Russian Literature. Furthermore his translation from

De Brei's excerpt on Livonian peasants shows where Bestuzhev's interests lay as early as 1818. In fact in Journey to Reval Bestuzhev even advises readers to read De Brei's Essai Critique sur l'histoire de la Livonie, "in which the present condition of the whole of Livonia is described in detail". *

From the outset Bestuzhev displays concern for the peasants and declares:

I learned that the condition of the peasants here has greatly improved in the moral and physical respects. The owners, contributing to the aim of wise government, apparently receive benefit from this; husbandry flourishes in this region; it encourages distillation, and the Estonians are gradually growing unused to drunkenness, idleness, and all the vices which accompany ignorance. **

Bestuzhev then delves into the history of the region and deals firstly with the invasion of the Danes and Germans in 1217. He mentions how the Estonians fought alongside Novgorodians during the unsuccessful siege of Reval in 1223, "and zealously, though vainly, aided the Russians". *** This theme of friendly relationship between Russians,

in particular Novgorodians, and Estonians later recurs in Neuhausen Castle where Vseslav and Andrey, the two Novgorodian heroes, come to the assistance of oppressed Estonians. Bestuzhev once again refers to the outstanding, undaunted courage of the Estonians who revolted against their feudal overlords in 1343 (not 1243, as Bestuzhev asserts).

In 1243, the Estonians, angered by the oppression of their new conquerors, raised the banner of freedom and their avenging iron was crimsoned with German blood. About 2,000 nobles and knights paid for their cruelty with their heads. The Estonians resolved to die, swords in hand, and fell to the last man, not far from Reval. There were 10,000 of them The utter enslavement of all Livonians was the result of this noble act, worthy of Sparta and Helvetia. *

The importance which Bestuzhev obviously attached to this incident can be explained by the outbreak of revolutions in Europe, beginning with the French Revolution of 1789, and culminating in the rash of uprisings in Spain, Naples, Portugal in 1820 and in Piedmont and Greece in 1821.

As in the Livonian tales, Bestuzhev occupies himself with a wholesale onslaught on the behaviour of the knights, who were coarse and ignorant, besotted and depraved, extravagant and godless. These bearers of religion and culture robbed the Estonians and "adorned their own wives with pearls and diamonds, and themselves with golden chain-mail". * The merchants and the bourgeoisie emulate the vices of the knights, a topic which receives fuller development in The Reval Tournament. Meanwhile, the Estonians suffered unbearable hardships:

The whole burden of taxes, labour and war fell on the poor inhabitants of Estonia, whom their owners tortured out of pure whim. **

Comparisons with conditions in Russia in the first decades of the nineteenth century immediately spring to the mind. Bestuzhev next makes the extremely noteworthy remark:

The inhabitants of Reval, passing under the yoke of one power to another, never ceased to be free, preserved their distinguishing character of honour in political life ***

noteworthy because the Decembrists were insistent on preserving the independence, freedom, nationalism, and culture of Russia, in the

economic, political and literary spheres.

Bestuzhev then relates a couple of episodes which re-appear in fictional form in his story The Reval Tournament. These episodes reflect his bitter hatred of the feudal masters and his profound sympathy for the destitute people. In the first, a simple merchant defeats a knight in the tournament of 1538, * and in the second the implacably cruel knight, Uxkull Von Reisenberg, is executed for murdering one of his vassals. ** Towards the end of his narrative, Bestuzhev's compassion is stronger than ever:

Livonia, the constant sacrifice to newcomers The proud, cruel knights tortured their peasants like helots; their enemies took from them what they could, their owners what they wanted, and they wanted everything. Each house was a castle, and each castle a fortress; the walls of the knights rose by the hands of their vassals, but the vassals did not have even huts to lay their heads, and the fields of their masters were watered with their bloody tears. War destroyed the crops, hunger and pestilence pillaged the population The castles which burdened the earth no longer exist; feudalism lies beneath their ruins. ***

Even a perfunctory reading of Journey to Reval is sufficient to indicate how deeply engrossed Bestuzhev was with the position of the Estonian nation - with their traditions and customs, life and history. He made a serious study of the region and the sixth letter contains references to the works of Christian Kelkh and Balthazar Russov, with which he had evidently acquainted himself. He criticises the Livonian chronicles for not giving a balanced and fair account of events and for failing to mention the rights of the inhabitants of Reval. * He also complains that "not one skald, not one writer from the milieu of the Livonians has transmitted the exploits of his people to later generations". ** Bestuzhev is undeniably refuting the theories of the German-Baltic chroniclers who had eulogised the exploits of the German conquerors, intimating that they combatted paganism, brought enlightenment and culture, were ideal heroes endowed with the principles of honour and justice. Bestuzhev submits to us exactly the reverse side of the coin. He sedulously sets forth reasons for the struggle of the Estonians against their detested taskmasters and purposely selects a series of events from the history of Livonia which demonstrate the rightness of their continued efforts to free themselves from the yoke that embittered their existence. He represents the Decembrist viewpoint of praise for struggles of national liberation.

Journey to Revel continues the tradition of Radishchev's Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow and follows the same lines as Fyodor Glinka's Letters of a Russian Officer and S.K. Von Ferelzt's Journey of Criticism - travel books which fearlessly described Russian actuality, national customs and habits, the misfortunes of the people, the horrors of serfdom, the absolute rule of landowners. There are none of the bucolic descriptions of the Karamzinian literature of travels, none of its excessive sentimentality, but rather the whole effect is one of protest against the Karamzinians. Bestuzhev is executing the identical technique he employed in the Livonian tales. Although not treating Russia directly, he is nonetheless directing his offensive against conditions in Russia, where serfdom brought in its wake poverty, hunger, sorrow and toil.

Nowhere, however, is the position of the people expressed with such clarity and vehemence as in the revolutionary song Ah, I feel wretched. * Bestuzhev admitted his coauthorship in this song as well as accepting full responsibility for the ritual ("podblyudnyye") songs:

I do not know whether Ryleyev did this on the instigation of the Society, only one day towards the end of 1822, in a cheerful frame of mind he invited me to write something liberal in the language of the people, and we wrote Ah, I feel wretched together, but I alone wrote some ritual songs, **

Ryleyev and Bestuzhev achieved their aim of writing something "in the language of the people" with amazing success, for Ah, I feel wretched is written from the angle of the enslaved peasants, in a forthright, simple, comprehensible and powerful style. Nikolay Bestuzhev bears witness in his memoirs to the profound effect such songs actually had on the people:

Although the government tried by all measures to destroy these songs wherever they could be found, yet they were written in the spirit of the simple people and were too close to their condition to be effaced from their memory, since they saw in them a true depiction of their actual position and the possibility of improvement in the future. ¹

Moreover the soldiers likewise did not escape the potent influence of these songs:

An N.C.O. of the naval artillery told us by heart all the forbidden verses and songs of Ryleyev, adding that there was not a gunner who could read who did not have works of this kind copied out and especially the songs of Ryleyev. ²

1. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevskikh. p 27.

2. Ibid. p 28.

Ah, I feel wretched touches every aspect of the people's oppression and is an exhaustive survey of all the injustices and malpractices inflicted on them. It begins with a lament at the incredible heartlessness of the landowning lords, at the slavery which is imposed on the martyred peasants.

Ah, I feel wretched
Even in my native land;
All is in bondage,
Inflicted by terrible fate,
Apparently, for all time.

Will the Russian people
Long be the junk of masters,
And will they long trade
With people
As with cattle?

Who has enslaved us,
Who has conferred nobility on them,
And over us,
Poor peasants,
Offered them a seat with a lash?

.....

And freedom
Among the people
Is stifled by the power of lords.

.....

And now our masters
Rob us shamelessly

.....

They flay us alive,
We sow - and they reap.
They are thieves,
Fleecers,
And they suck our blood, like leeches. *

Even the parish priest joins in the wholesale exploitation of the defenceless peasants. There is no justice in the courts for the peasants; the judges are deaf to their pleas and they are found guilty even when innocent. Bribery is needed to get past the guard or to procure a hearing from the assessor, chairman or secretary. The tsar has blighted their lives with extortion, taxes and roadwork. The soldiers in the countryside treat them as though they were enemies. They have to pay exorbitant sums for even water. Decrees inspired by Arakcheyev

increase the horrors of their existence. "

In spite of the fact that the Decembrists ignored the people as a concrete factor in the revolutionary struggle with the autocracy, in this song they proved that they could speak the language of the people, express their burden, and reflect their mood and opinions. The song is a savage indictment of Russia, attaining unique heights of civil enthusiasm. Never before had the Decembrists written anything replete with such condemnatory force, with such embittered feeling, and with such seething indignation.

Military service in Russia was a circumstance which the Decembrists found especially repulsive. Apart from the twenty five years each soldier was obliged to serve, army life itself was intolerable. Alexander I conceived the idea of establishing military colonies and entrusted their management to Count Arakcheyev; the choice could not have been a worse one, for from all accounts he was a bigot and a petty bureaucrat, undiplomatic and merciless, the object of universal hatred. The Decembrists never ceased to condemn the military set-up which to them symbolised the arrant tyranny of the régime and which had transformed Russia into a huge Prussian barracks. Pestel' described his feeling of indignation at "what he had heard about the military colonies" and "the oppression of military service for the soldiers". ¹ Rayevsky devoted a whole treatise entitled The Soldier ² to this problem, enumerating the hardships to be borne by the Russian soldier: rigid disciplinary procedures, tyrannical, mercenary and unreasonable leadership, disproportionately

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 503.

2. Ibid. pp 475 - 478.

severe corporal punishment, illegality and inequity, lack of rights of defence or channels of complaint, irksome tasks and duties. A heartfelt protest against the unenviable fate of the soldier was voiced by Yakubovich, who singled out the wearisome length of military service, the necessity of abandoning parents, wife and children, the fear which dominated a soldier's life, the corruption and ignorance rife amongst officers and the ensuing inhumane treatment of their subordinates. ¹

Arakcheyev did not escape his share of adverse criticism: Ryleyev's To A Favourite, addressed to Arakcheyev, referred to the latter as evil, faithless, arrogant, base and insidious, a cunning flatterer, ungrateful friend, furious tyrant, villain and scoundrel. ²

Nikolay Bestuzhev elaborated on this portrait of Arakcheyev:

alone, unseen, without any manifest post, in the secret of his study, (he) resolved the whole burden of state affairs, and his malicious, shady policy stealthily crept into all branches of the government The whole state trembled beneath the iron hand of the ruler's favourite. No one dared to complain: if the slightest grumble arose - he vanished forever in the wastes of Siberia or the stinking vaults of fortresses. ³

1. A. K. Borozdin, Iz pisem i pokazaniy dekabristov SPb. 1906, p 78.

2. Orlov, op. cit., p 3.

3. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh, pp 11 - 12.

Alexander Bestuzhev acutely observed the military situation, and noting the lack of education in the army, wrote to Y. N. Tolstoy in 1824:

The officers are empty and sink lower from day to day. *

Of the dissatisfaction of the soldiers he said:

The soldiers grumbled at their exhaustion with drills, cleaning and watches, the officers at the meagre wages and excessive severity, the sailors at unskilled labour, doubled by abuses, naval officers at enforced idleness. **

He could not fail to pass comment on the much-maligned military colonies:

The colonies paralysed not only the intellects but all the trades of the places where they were established, and struck terror in the remainder. ***

These political statements were expressed in literary fashion in Bestuzhev's agitational songs. In Our Tsar is a Russian (Prussian) ¹ German, **** Alexander is satirised mercilessly for his Prussian-like maniacal obsession with military parades and ostentation:

1. The texts of this song vary.

Our tsar is a Russian German,
He wears a tight full-dress coat.

.....

Where does he reign?
He spends every day at riding-school.

.....

He clasps his elbows,
Tucks them in his claws.

.....

Although the enemy of enlightenment,
He loves the study of drill.

.....

Only for parades
Does he dispense rewards.

.....

And for compliments -
Blue ribbons.

.....

And for mother-truth
He sends you straight to Kamchatka.

Neither is the notorious Arakcheyev omitted from this song:

And Count Arakcheyev

Is the worst of villains.

The satirical song entitled Along the Fontanka River ^{is} is a wholesale attack on the miserable burdens imposed on the soldiers:

Along the Fontanka River

The regiments are billeted.

.....

Always the Guards!

Regiments are billeted.

.....

They are drilled and tortured,

There is no light, no dawn.

.....

There is no light, no dawn,

For the amusement of the tsar.

.....

In Ah, I feel wretched we hear the lament of the peasants who describe their clash with the soldiers and the chaos and desolation caused by the colonies, and finally lay the blame at the doorstep of Arakcheyev and the tsar:

And in the country the soldier,
Although to all appearances our brother,
Doesn't care a straw
And fights
As though in enemy land.

And under the imperial eagle
They regale us with poison in the wine.
And the people
For only water
Are ordered to pay four times as much.

So as to punish us,
God thought of granting us
Colonies
For our destruction,
For the misfortune of the orthodox.

.....

For all these enterprises
Arakcheyev
Is the one to blame - for it all.

He urges on the tsar,
The tsar signs a decree.
To him it's a joke,
But to us it's terrible,

.....

*

There was ample reason for Bestuzhev's personal bitterness on this score, as he himself had belonged to a dragoon regiment, stationed near Peterhof in Marli (hence the pseudonym "Marlinsky"), ever since 1816, and had become an officer approximately eighteen months later. He therefore had occasion to witness at first hand the military establishment he grew to dislike so intensely. His brothers Nikolay, Mikhail, Pyotr and Pavel, who all served in various capacities, must likewise have furnished him with countless instances of injustice and discontent in the ranks. The Semenovsky incident is a case in point; their rebellion aroused Bestuzhev's whole-hearted sympathy. Bestuzhev was appointed aide-de-camp to Count Komarovsky, General Betancourt, and Duke Vyurtembergsky in turn between 1822 and 1825, and could continue his observations freely and unhampered. The army in fact was a hotbed of insurrection; the vanguard of the Decembrist movement consisted of high-ranking officers: Prince Sergey Trubetskoy

was colonel of the Guards of the Preobrazhensky regiment, Prince Yevgeniy Obolensky was lieutenant of the Guards of the Finlyandsky regiment, Pestel' was commander of the infantry in the Vyatsky regiment. As such they had great influence, and Major-General Mikhail Orlov's decree, which punished three commanders for their cruelty and warned others of a similar impending fate unless they mended their ways, was tantamount to a revolutionary proclamation, published as it was at the gloomiest period of Arakcheyevian reaction, when torture of the soldiers was legalised along with the utter destruction of their human dignity, and when such an order in defence of their rights was completely unheard of.¹

A further abuse which the Decembrists could not brook was extortion in high places, especially the courts. Pestel' denounced "the injustice and venality of the courts and other authorities",² while Mikhail Lunin claimed that one of the objects of the secret society was to abolish the procrastination, secretiveness and

1. Orlov, op. cit., pp 468 - 469.

2. Ibid. p 503.

costs of law-suits.¹ Like the other Decembrists, Bestuzhev looked with disdain on the nefarious conduct so alien to his character as an honourable Russian noble, and wrote in a highly aggrieved tone:

.... only judicial places were happy, because only for them was Russia the promised land. Their extortion reached an incredible degree of shamelessness. Clerks acquired horses, officials bought villages, and only a rise in the price of bribes distinguished the higher places, so that in the capital, under the very eyes of observers, a blatant ~~obscure~~ auctioning of justice went on Profitable enterprises were sold at the statutory price and were laden with rents in the treasury, the courts, and the commissariats, among governors and governor-generals, wherever interest was involved, whoever could - stole, and whoever did not dare - pilfered. Everywhere honest people suffered, whilst rogues and cheats rejoiced. *

The agitational and ritual songs give numerous hints as to the abysmal state of legality in Russia. One of the ritual songs relates:

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 515.

Now there are two rainbows in the sky,
And two joys for good people:
Justice in court, and freedom everywhere,
And they will be granted to the orthodox. Glory be! *

Our Tsar is a Russian German contains the lines -

All the judges are gendarmes,
and says of the tsar -

He is afraid of the laws. **

Ah, I feel wretched states the hopeless case of the peasant confronted
by the avaricious representatives of the law:

Peasant, seek no justice
Anywhere in court,
Without cyanosis
The judges are deaf,
Without guilt you are guilty.

To get into the chamber,
First of all pay the guard
For his paper,
For his bravery,
Give for everything, for everything!

There every soul
Is twisted just for a farthing.

The assessor,

The chairman,

At one with the secretary. *

The Northern Society of the Decembrists long debated the possible revenge to be meted out by the Russian people. The agitational songs are an unambiguous call for reprisals, for a settlement with the landowners, officials and tsar himself. One song ** asks -

Tell me quickly

How in Russia tsars

Are crushed.

Along the Fontanka River demands, regarding the Guards;

Have they really no hands

To save themselves from torments?

Have they really no bayonets

For the snivelling princes?

Have they really no lead

For the villainous tyrant? ***

The peasants in Ah, I Feel Wretched proclaim:

And what is taken from us by force

We will restore by force. *

In another song a blacksmith leaves the forge, carrying three knives:

Here is the first knife - for the evil grandees.

And the second knife - for the priests, the hypocrites.

And uttering a prayer - the third knife for the tsar. **

Yet another song describes the journey of a peasant who takes his axe with him, intent on murder. *** Lastly arrant hostility overflows in this song:

Now you are weaving ropes for the heads of lords,

You are sharpening knives for eminent princes:

And in the place of lamps you will hang tsars!

Then warmth, intellect, and light will reign. Glory be! ****

Of a milder but of a strong civil bent was Roman and Olga, a tale of ancient Novgorod, which appeared in the Polar Star for 1823. Among the Decembrists Novgorod occupied a symbolic place as the home of freedom

and democracy. Bestuzhev was even preparing to undertake a History of Novgorod, and telling of his uncompleted plans, he wrote to N. Polevoy on the 12th. February, 1831,

At one time I intended to write a History of Novgorod, my country but then I should not have begun work without checking on the spot all details, and long and intently burying myself in the gloom of manuscripts, with the lamp of criticism. *

The Decembrists recalled with delight the former glory of the old Russian republics, and Ryleyev in a letter of January, 1825, advised Pushkin to write about the Novgorod - Pskov region -

that true land of inspiration,

where

the last flashes of Russian freedom were stifled. ¹

This cult of ancient Novgorod was shared by Pestel', who asserted in his testimony:

The story of great Novgorod also confirmed me in the republican way of thinking. ²

1. Shchipanov, op. cit., p 548.

2. Vosstaniye Dekabristov, vol. 4. p 91.

Bestuzhev endows Roman, the hero of his story, with all the qualities that make up the perfect Novgorodian -

"Roman Yasenskiy is good and handsome, has served Novgorod in faith and truth, has endured much for holy Russia; he is skilful at holding forth in assemblies and conversations; he is daring at tournaments, clever at everything, friendly to all". *

Yuriy Voyeslav defends Roman from Simeon Voyeslav's accusation of mercenariness by outlining Roman's readiness for self-sacrifice - the prime virtue of any Decembrist noble:

"he who has selflessly sacrificed his blood and youth for his country and first set fire to his ancestral home so that it should not fall to the enemies of Novgorod, will certainly not barter his soul for a dowry!" **

Another ideal to be maintained by the Decembrists was that of the responsible citizen; Yuriy Voyeslav reproaches his brother, with reference to Roman -

"Do not discredit a good citizen". ***

Bestuzhev, after these preliminary notifications of Roman's talents, then allows them to develop in the course of the action. We witness his ability to narrate stories -

How she loved to listen to Roman's tales of the distant campaigns of the Novgorodians, and his exceptional bravery -

Her heart stopped beating when she listened to the horrors hanging over Roman's head during captivity and the dangers during his escape to the fatherland from the shores of the Black Sea. *

His gifted singing is noted, as he sings for the crowd which has gathered on the day of the festival when requested to do so.

Another basic element in the story is the principle of meeting and discussing matters democratically at an assembly. A bell summons the inhabitants of Novgorod to the city square, where they gather and pronounce speeches in turn, advocating a policy to be adopted in some situation. In this case the princes of Moscow and Livonia threaten Novgorod, demanding her submission and aid in the war against the German sword-bearers. The first speaker advises a policy of peaceful subordination to the will of the Muscovite prince, but Roman protests against this professed weakness, pronouncing a speech which is reminiscent of Decembrist rhetoric, replete with the liberalism reigning in the 1820's

in Russia. He speaks with warmth of Church and state self-government, the various subtleties of international right, the necessity for a close union between Russia and the West, he tries to destroy belief in the omnipotence of Moscow, and he attacks all concessions of political rights. He appeals to the people as free citizens to choose freedom and honour even if it means dying for them, to keep the oaths they have sworn.

"Free inhabitants of free Novgorod! I am amazed that a Novgorodian could propose measures so contrary to the benefit of his compatriots! We swore to be governed in the affairs of the Church by our bishop; we kissed the cross in the name of peace with the knights - shall we now play with our souls so as to please Vitovt? But can we, do we wish to violate our hospitality, famed of old! Through what gates will crafts, fancy-work and all the new inventions of distant lands flow into Russia? Through whom are we ourselves rich and powerful? The knot of trade will be broken, and impoverished Novgorod will be a certain prey to the first comer Vasilii is mighty and dangerous - all the more strongly must we arm ourselves.

They propose that you purchase peace by the temporary concession of your rights and to the eternal shame of your country. Citizens, have you never experienced that concessions become someone else's right? shall we sleep beneath the storm? Or have you forgotten your brothers, the martyred Torzhetskians, or are there no Novgorodian hearts in Novgorod, or are there no swords left, or have you forgotten how to use them? Let hosts of Russians rise against their forefather, against great Novgorod: for us stands our mother, holy Sofia! " *

With this speech, culminating in its forceful battle-cry, steeped in the enthusiasm, style and rhythm of true Decembrist oratory,¹ Roman wins the citizens of Novgorod to his side.

Roman leaves Novgorod and his beloved Olga, thereby sacrificing his love and home, for the sake of his country; he gallops off to Moscow in an effort to insinuate himself in influential circles and persuade high-ranking officials of the justice of Novgorod's cause. He is captured on the way by a band of robbers, but when the leader, an exile from Novgorod named Berkut, discovers the import of Roman's mission, he frees him with the words:

¹. See pp 149 - 150 of present work.

"Here are your letters and your gold, it is untouched. Hasten whither your duty as a citizen calls you, and know that even in a robber can be hidden a Novgorodian soul. The Novgorodians have deprived me of happiness in life and salvation in heaven, but I love them, I love my country". *

It would seem that all connected with Novgorod share this profound feeling of patriotism, honour and selflessness.

A further indication of Roman's detestation of submissiveness in all forms is given during his journey to Moscow -

The roads were empty: occasional strings of carts wound their way along them, and the proud Novgorodian's heart seethed with indignation, seeing how they humbly turned aside before each Tartar who arrogantly careered and galloped along on a stolen horse. **

Roman fulfils his errand faithfully, but is eventually exposed, arrested and imprisoned. When Yevstafiy Syt, formerly the prince's deputy in Novgorod, promises him riches and honours as well as the hand of his daughter in marriage if he betray Novgorod and serve Moscow, Roman is highly indignant and flares up angrily,

" I will not sell my country for all the goods in the world, I do not want to negotiate with the enemy of Novgorod

If I accepted your proposal having once attained freedom, I would be a traitor, but now I would be a contemptible coward!" *

Roman, even in captivity, is prone to these inspired speeches, and he is willing to embrace death rather than submit. "I have obviously only one bride - death!" he tells Yevstafiy, and Bestuzhev relates,

With the proud, comforting thought of dying for love and for his country, Roman awaited unavoidable death. ***

In the Decembrist view, death for one's country was a blessing and the supreme achievement for any patriot.

Roman is finally released by Berkut and they join the battle against the troops from Moscow, with the cry of Berkut, "Let us now perish gloriously for our country!" *** The whole purpose of the tale is the ecstatic propagation of the Decembrist ideal of the perfect revolutionary - a man of honour, ready to undergo any trial or sacrifice, glad to accept death, when the fate of the fatherland is at stake.

Much of Bestuzhev's pre-revolutionary poetry is imbued with social comment and Decembrist bias. In 1819 he wrote Imitation of Boileau's First Satire,^{*} which did not appear in print, possibly owing to censorship.^{**} He stigmatises the present state of affairs in the society of St. Petersburg, which is corrupted by mercenariness, insincerity and a host of other vices, and launches an attack on the authorities who are guilty of manifold crimes:

I shall flee from you, I shall flee, walls of Petropol,
I shall hide in the gloom of forests, in remote caverns,
Wherever the savage glance of insidiousness
Or the throng of judges, clerks and police spies has not reached,
Wherever the braggart or liar has not approached,
Wherever the ear has not been tortured by slander or flattery.
I shall flee! I have found the golden thread of freedom.

The poet refuses all reconciliation rather than renounce his own honour for the sake of promotion and monetary advantage:

Can I deceive? can I pretend?
No! it is shameful to grovel before advancement.
Free in thoughts, though chained by fate,
I shall not barter my soul for profit.
I do not wish, having designs on medals or rank,
To wash away with forgetfulness the offences of grandees.

Moreover the characters of the public are poisoned by their possession of money or lack of it:

Haughtiness is lawful for the rich,
And compliance, slavery, and flattery are becoming to the poor.

All sense of values has been cast to the winds and the wrong people are rewarded:

In our iron age fortune the magician
Makes directors out of stupid clerks.

Society ignores the men who are worthiest of eulogy and recompense for their labour, and poets can be seen

...dragging out their lives without money or friends,
In spring without shoes, and in winter without overcoats,
Paler than monks at the end of Holy Week,
Receiving as a reward for all their labours
Mockery.....

whilst

...the best poet here, the pride of the Russian people,
Will forever be read on a level with fools.

The anger of Bestuzhev grows with every verse, and he violently criticises almost every tainted aspect of life in the capital, insisting on the necessity of flight:

Let us leave the corrupt town,
Distinguished only for its buildings- not for its virtue,
Where audacious vice is the guide for all actions,
Where they travel by one path to earn happiness,
Where insidiousness is concealed in the incense of subtle flattery,
Where one must purchase honours at the price of honour,
Where a fanatic hides beneath the mask of the law,

.....

Where science and knowledge are held in contempt by all.

The only accomplishment people endeavour to master is

The art of stealing cleverly and oppressing courteously.

Bestuzhev issues his challenge to this society, refuses to comply with its rules and obeys its injunction to hold his peace -

I am ordered to keep silent

and thereby hints at the rigid censorship which held writers in its grasp.

The entire poem is an unreserved and forthright attack on St. Petersburg society, and was therefore withheld from print. Bestuzhev spared no manifestation of evil, condemning the injustice, ignorance, lack of freedom, inequality, and depravity which were rife in the capital.

In the same year Bestuzhev wrote another poem commencing Near the camp stood a handsome youth, * in which he propounded the Decembrist ethic of heroism, self-sacrifice, and patriotism. The young warrior proclaims:

" Winds, fly

To the lands of my fathers, to my beloved,

Tell her I was always true

To my country, glory, honour, and her.

My fatherland, the image of my sweetheart

Inspire me in battles;

With their miraculous strength

They implant the spirit of heroism in my breast. "

He then requests, that if he dies in the battle,

" Tell her I fell fighting for my country,
For glory, and for my beloved. "

This was the very essence of Decembrist thought; there was nothing nobler than to die for the cause of one's country. Ryleyev endlessly reminded his fellow-conspirators of the need for this and uttered such exhortatory phrases as:

" I am sure we shall die, but the example will remain.
We shall sacrifice ourselves for the future freedom of our
country. " ¹

1824 saw another poem, which clearly reminds one of Ryleyev's Meditations. Ryleyev had described heroes from the past history of Russia, so as to awaken the prowess of youth and encourage them in the future struggle with the autocracy. Bestuzhev, in the spirit of Ryleyev, chooses Mikhail Tverskoy * and sets the sombre scene in a prison, where a young man is bidding farewell to his aged father, who is about to be executed. The old hero, before his moment of self-sacrifice, remains steadfast

1. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevskikh, p 34.

in his principles and advises his son:

" Always be true to justice and honour. "

This line of Bestuzhev's is worthy to be counted a maxim of the Decembrist ideal. However, Russia is still full of "savage tyrants", and the young prince looking upon the wounded corpse of his father, shedding bitter tears, and rending his garments, calls upon the God of vengeance. Bestuzhev narrates:

He heeded him, this powerful God,

Helped Russians to rebel,

W And removed the tyrants from the face of the earth.

Coming as it did, a year before the Decembrist rebellion, this poem was a prophetic warning to the tyrant, a truly revolutionary poem which promised revenge and the correction of all wrong.

(b) Works that may be interpreted as political and Decembrist.

Much of Bestuzhev's work, though not openly political in tone, may be viewed in this light if taken in a political context. Bestuzhev printed articles and reviews in all the most prominent journals of the twenties, namely Sorevnovatel' prosveshcheniya i blagotvoreniya, Literaturnyye listki, Syn otechestva, and Blagonamerennyy, and proved himself to be the most versatile of writers, adopting the guise of literary critic, historian, satirist, ethnographer, publicist, raconteur, archaeologist, and play reviewer. As early as 1818 he discussed the question of the peasantry in a translated extract entitled "On the Present Moral and Physical Condition of Livonian and Estonian Peasants" * from Count Franz-Gabriel de Brei's book Essai critique sur l'histoire de la Livonie.¹ In this passage, there is a description of the morals, ancient customs, dress and songs of the peasants, and admiration is openly expressed for the capacity for work, giftedness and high moral standards of Russian peasants, the author being outraged at serfdom in Russia.

1. The original could not be traced; Mordovchenko and Bazanov, op.cit., transliterate the author's name and the title of his book in different ways.

A further instance that his sympathy with Decembrist aspirations was aroused early on, was his indignation at the action of Louis XIV, who "ordered the removal from his picture gallery of all Teniers' landscapes where rural occasions were portrayed". Bestuzhev attacks the French king for his contempt of the peasants, exclaiming:

I do not believe in the greatness of your soul, proud Louis XIV, when you could despise the most useful class of the people! *

He displays concern for the peasants in his article "On Wooden Structure in Russia", where he advised teaching peasants as quickly as possible how to build dwellings out of brick. **

Bestuzhev revealed his Decembrist frame of mind when he drew a portrait of Demosthenes in his article "The Orator". The Decembrists attributed great importance to political eloquence and among them were men of brilliant talent such as Orlov, Pestel', Nikita Murav'ev, Bestuzhev - Ryumin, Rayevsky and Lunin. ¹ Bestuzhev described Demosthenes' hold over his audience and his call to the battle for

1. Bazanov, op. cit., p 167.

freedom.

Imagine Demosthenes, speaking to the most famous assembly in the whole world about a matter on which depended the fate of the most famous of peoples! The lightning of eloquence fuses everyone into a whole. The whole assembly, moved by the same feeling, becomes one person, one voice: general exclamations ring out: we will march against Philip: we will fight for freedom, we will conquer or die! *

The Decembrists considered oratory as an integral part of revolution, as the means for drawing on citizens and soldiers to battle. Sergey Murav'ev-Apostol's Orthodox Catechism¹ and Bestuzhev-Ryumin's Speech at a meeting of the United Slavs and his Proclamation to the People² are perfect models of Decembrist oratory. We know also that Bestuzhev roused the troops of the Moskovsky regiment with a fiery speech on the 14th. of December, 1825, and that his closest colleague, Ryleyev, inspired all the conspirators with his poetic exhortations.

1. Orlov, op. cit., pp 500 - 501.

2. Ibid. p 502.

Bestuzhev was always conscious of civil content and liberal intentions, and this is apparent from "The Letter of the Pope to the Bishop of Rochester before his banishment", * where he expresses the meaning of exile for a man of lofty and noble mind, or from "The Speech of Lord Chatham on American Affairs in 1777", ** where he repeats Chatham's speech in favour of peace with America.

Bestuzhev's literary opinions also fall into line with the Decembrist conception of the role of literature in society. The Decembrists sought in literature examples of high morality, lofty thoughts, and heroic deeds, since these elements would have a positive influence on readers and by correcting the moral nature of humanity it was possible to change the social structure. Bestuzhev hence spoke with delight of the "most noble" Tacitus and his Agricola, which "all who possess a heart must read with reverence". *** He likewise lavished praise on Milton and evaluated his poetry extremely highly. **** Bestuzhev's attack on Kotzebue's tales deserves attention. August Kotzebue, the German reactionary writer, was stabbed by Karl Sand at the same time as Bestuzhev's review on Kotzebue's A Present To My Sons on the New Year appeared. ***** In this review Bestuzhev mocked

Kotzebue's views on moral education, as he was dissatisfied with the moral of his tales. Bestuzhev advocated preaching the purest morals to youths, whereas Kotzebue preached morals that were merely utilitarian. The aim of improving the morals of man can be advanced by forming and purifying his taste, because good taste influences morality and sheds charm on all the actions of man. He discusses this in "On Taste", * putting forward the theory that it is the government's affair to develop the public's taste, for "true taste adorns the disposition of a man, makes his soul more accessible to the realisation of everything good and great!"

Perhaps the foremost problem confronting the Decembrists was that of serfdom, an evil which had to be eradicated before any economic or moral advancements could be achieved. The lot of the peasant was intolerable, as Yakubovich explained in a letter to Nicholas I in 1825:

The entire burden of taxation and obligations, the ruinous extravagance of the nobility, all falls upon that respectable but unfortunate class. ¹

1. Borozdin, op. cit., p 77.

2. Ibid. p 50.

3. Ibid. p 47.

Nikolay Turgenev's comprehensive treatise Something on the Situation of Serdom in Russia, displayed deep concern for the pitiful condition of the peasantry,

From it (i.e. the autocracy) and from it alone can we hope for the liberation of our brothers from slavery, as unjust as it is useless. It is a sin to think of political freedom when millions do not know even natural freedom. ¹

In his testimony, Pestel' revealed the causes of his discontent and emphasised -

I directed my thoughts and attention also to the position of the people, the slavery of the peasants always having a powerful effect on me. ²

Perhaps the most evocative description in Decembrist political writings was given by Rayevsky, who complained that the peasants "in torn shirts, with pale, worn-out faces and dull eyes, beg not from people (for their owners are tyrants), but from judges for food, rest and death". ³

1. Orlov, op. cit., p 450.

2. Ibid. p 503.

3. Ibid. p 473.

Some saw serfdom as a menace to the state, others as a handicap which retarded economic growth, and yet others as unethical and unjustifiable. Bestuzhev belonged to the latter group, and his fleeting references to the condition of the peasants in his early articles acquire profound significance when judged against the background of his political opinions, as do the Livonian tales and the travelogue Journey to Reval, which is closely associated with them. For the cycle of Livonian tales and the autobiographical Journey to Reval are all concerned with the persecution of peasants by their masters and the basic evils underlying the very system of feudalism. The fact that Bestuzhev recounts the historical and fictional maltreatment of Estonian peasants by German knights is immaterial. It is always self-evident that Bestuzhev is dealing with contemporary affairs in Russia and is veiling the real intentions of his work in order to deceive the vigilant eye of the censor, who had kept Imitation of Boileau's First Satire from print.

In the above-mentioned letter to Nicholas I, Bestuzhev complains at the cruelty which nobles show the peasants:

The conduct of Russian nobles in this respect is terrible. Negroes on plantations are happier than many peasants. To sell families by retail, to seduce innocence, to corrupt the wives of peasants, is considered natural and carried out openly. Not to mention the corvée and quitrents, there are monsters who give their wolfhound puppies to be breast-fed by peasant-women!

He asserts that minor landowners "torture their poor peasants mercilessly".* Hence the villainous knights portrayed in the Livonian tales come to life as tyrannical Russian landowners. In Wenden Castle, the brutal Von Rorbach is castigated as a vicious, overbearing master, with no regard for his vassals. He says of them scornfully:

"Patience - for vassals?

These half-men serve while there's a knife over their necks and fear over their heads". **

Von Serrat champions the cause of the oppressed vassals and proclaims fully in the spirit of Decembrist ideals,

"I do not consider it a joke when humanity suffers", ***

finally protesting against Von Rorbach's callous flouting of the rights of others:

"I was silent when you set snares for the chamois in my groves, and killed hares on my meadow reserves, but now, when God grants the peasants good weather, and you tear their hands away from invaluable work, when you trample the corn with your horses - corn watered with bloody sweat, when finally you punish subjects for obedience to my authority, I had to say what I said". *

A further indication that Bestuzhev's sympathy lay with the downtrodden peasants is contained in a letter written shortly afterwards. Wenden Castle was written during the campaign in the Western Provinces ** and was completed on the 23rd. May, 1821; on the 2nd. June, 1821, ¹ Bestuzhev wrote to his mother from Vitebsk province:

It is a pity just to behold the peasants Not a single one has a human face - they are pale, thin and worn out You can imagine their position. ***

1. Pamyati Dekabristov puts the date at 2nd. July.

In the second Livonian tale, Neuhausen Castle,¹ Bestuzhev categorically affirms his detestation of feudalism by condemning the feudal lords and their habitations. The castle in Esel was built not for defence but for oppressing people, and the evil, scheming Romuald Von Mey is put to death "so as not to infect the air with his breath". * Here Bestuzhev attacks the moral foundations of feudalism, showing all the inner conflicts it produces within a seemingly normal family. Von Mey typifies the unscrupulous characters who are the inevitable by-product of feudal society. The justice of this society is likewise inexorable and biased, executed as it is by a secret court which favours the strong and influential.

The knights and nobles in The Reval Tournament² are also exposed to Bestuzhev's caustic satire. The knights are perpetually in a drunken stupor, Donnerbaz missing the tournament owing to his carousal. They are haughty in the extreme and have no regard for intellectual qualities; Baron Burtneck refuses to give his daughter to a man "whose pedigree is in an accounts book and who has no coat-of-arms". ** They are devoid of consideration for others; Burtneck will not consent to repair the bridge over the marsh

1. Neuhausen Castle first appeared in the Polar Star for 1824.

2. The Reval Tournament first appeared in the Polar Star for 1825.

on his territory although travellers are prevented from crossing. They think nothing of seizing land from one another by force. Bestuzhev lavishes his contempt on these Livonian knights, "who grew up on hunting, and reached manhood on robbery, knights discourteous with ladies, arrogant to all, overbearing amongst themselves, preferring to drink to the health of beauties in their own circle than to spend time conversing with them". *

It is not surprising then that the Estonian peasants are treated inhumanely by these vicious overlords. Baron Burtneck is ever-ready to unleash his violent insults on the head of an unsuspecting servant, and roars at one servant threateningly:

"This mug is empty, like your headWhere are you going, you unkempt animal, where are you going?"

Casting a contemptuous glance at him, Burtneck informs his friends:

"A curse on the creatures: You can teach a bear how to dance quicker than an Estonian to behave properly".

Extremely significant is Burtneck's next remark that the Estonians are becoming unmanageable "ever since the local council dared to cut off

knight Udkull's head just because he hung his vassal at the Reval walls for a couple of hours". * This is a patent reference to the factual story of Udkull Von Reisenberg, who was exceedingly cruel to his vassals, there being no limit to his tyranny. He tortured to death on the walls of the town one of his vassals. As a consequence he was seized, condemned to death, and executed, despite the efforts of the nobles to rescue him. Bestuzhev had previously related this episode in his Journey to Reval in 1820. ** This coincidence of fact and fiction testifies further to the close relationship between Bestuzhev's real political views and his literary pursuits.

The nobles are treated with no less scorn by Bestuzhev. They are empty-headed and foolish, and in his sardonic caricatures the young merchant Edwin spares no aspect of their characters. He says of Luft, one of these nobles:

"He composes epitaphs and wedding songs, schemes for knights to invade enemy territory and meet the wives of friends; he examines horses' teeth, drives the merchants mad, and cures hunting dogs He is the most enlightened head in all Reval". ***

The last in the cycle of Livonian tales, Eisen Castle, contains Bestuzhev's most virulent condemnation of the Livonian knights. After describing the formidable edifice of Eisen Castle, he remarks,

However even the knights were bright fellows. They built castles with the hands of others, and said: they are for defence against others; and when they had built them and settled in them, as in eagles' nests, it turned out to be for plundering their own land. *

Bestuzhev creates the figure of the fearsome Baron Bruno Von Eisen as the centrepiece of his story, a man who surpasses his fellow-knights in savagery and ferocity. The band of followers he gathers round him for assistance in his raids and reckless adventures are hardened criminals.

Fearful, ragged, but wearing swords and iron caps aslant, they strolled through the Estonians' huts, thrashed them to pass the time, caressed their daughters and took a contribution from their wives. **

This description of immoral behaviour accords exactly with Bestuzhev's observations in his letter to the tsar which have been cited above.

Bruno's maltreatment of the Estonian peasants is unbounded; if he encountered one of his own serfs, the likely result would be as follows:-

If he fancied a peasant's horse: "Devil take you! Change your horse for my one-eyed dog!" "Dear master! It's my job to hunt, and what good will I be without a horse?" "For the gallows, you idle loafer! You ought to be satisfied that I allow you to have its puppies and that your wife will nurse two for me!" The poor fellow would burst into scalding tears, and enter his cold hut for an empty cup. Otherwise he'd be beaten as well, as he's not allowed to weep. *

The apparently casual reference to the peasant's wife nursing the baron's puppies is highly significant when one considers that Bestuzhev mentions this same abuse in his letter to Nicholas I from the Petropavlovsk Fortress.

Bruno deals even more ruthlessly with someone else's serf:

He would catch sight of an Estonian and gallop up to him with upraised sword. "Read 'I believe in the one God', you good-for-nothing!" And the latter would freeze onto his knees, not knowing a word of German. "I don't understand!" "Read, I say!"

"I don't understand" "Ah! so you persist in your paganism, animal!I'll baptise you! Swish, and the head of the poor fellow rolled on the ground like a skittles ball, and the baron with a laugh galloped on, pronouncing "Absolvo te," i.e. I absolve you, - because they as spiritual knights, could at the same time destroy the body and save the soul. *

Besides exposing the merciless brutality of the German knights, this incident also underlines their overwhelming hypocrisy. Whereas they made pretensions to be fulfilling the sacred task of spreading Christianity and helping in the struggle against paganism, in reality they brought fire and sword instead of culture.

Bruno Von Eisen's tyrannical oppression of the Estonian people stretches even to his own guests:

The baron would be drinking with his neighbours and fly into a temper like a turkey-cock: "Am I or aren't I?" He would accept no one as his equal, he was braver than all, he was nobler than all! And someone only had to look askance, and he would be quarrelling and abusing, and before long up in arms! The end was that the guest who had come on horseback would be carried out on a stretcher, and as a favour without an ear or without a nose,

and often forever cured of toothache. But that is only part of it: if he grew angry with a neighbour, then onto his horse with his menials and dogs and off he went to trample the corn of others, to set fire to the woods of others. God help anyone who met him at such a black hour! *

Perhaps the true key to the meaning of the story is to be found in the connection between Livonian knights and Russian serf-owners is at all times obvious throughout the Livonian tales. Bruno Von Eisen is the culmination of all the vices inherent in the landowners whom Bestuzhev indicts in his analysis of the historical development of free thought in Russia. And it is in Eisen Castle, written in the same year as the Decembrist revolution, that Bestuzhev paints a highly typical and historically verisimilitudinous portrait of a feudal lord, which unlike the previous three Livonian tales is invented. At the very end of the tale, Bestuzhev declares: The story opens with the words:

The customs and occurrences of this tale are derived from Livonian chronicles **

which means Iron. And to tell the truth, it was so strong that in an addendum devised to deceive the censor. In a similar attempt to conceal the real purpose of the tale, Bestuzhev professes in the epigraph

to have heard the story when on a campaign from a captain who loved historical tales and old fables and who had learned about the castle from a pastor. * However, these epigraphs were popular in the literature of that time, and the former argument can therefore be explained away as a simple literary device.

Perhaps the true key to the meaning of the story is to be found in its style. Bestuzhev ventures to recount his story in a racy, intimate, almost carelessly naive manner. Eisen Castle is therefore comprehensible to even the least educated of readers. In these days of political ferment, prior to the Decembrist uprising, Bestuzhev's aim was to render his work as understandable as possible to the vast majority of the Russian people, and he achieves this goal by relating Eisen Castle in a rapid, facile way, employing an abundance of colloquial expressions as well as relapsing occasionally into fairy-tale narrative, reminiscent of Russian fabular literature. The story opens with the words:

A very long time ago, there stood a castle by the name of Eisen, which means Iron. And to tell the truth, it was so strong that neither word of mouth nor pen can describe it. **

It can scarcely be denied that Bestuzhev was impressing upon his readers the close relationship between Livonia and Russia, Between life under knights of the Teutonic order and life under equally loathsome Russian landowners.

An additional pointer to Bestuzhev's attention to Russian national affairs is his description of Baron Bruno's visit to the witch's hut, her awful appearance, her cat, and her witchcraft - events which are frequently encountered in Russian national fables,¹ as is the bow-and-arrow contest. Likewise Reginald and Louisa are portrayed in the style of old fables:

he was a stately, handsome lad; the daughter of a baron, by name of, God grant me memory, I think it was Louisa, happened to catch his fancy She was a splendid girl, the colour of poppies and whiter than snow.....*

By using these techniques Bestuzhev instils the feeling in the reader that he is really treating contemporary issues, and thus ideological interests find expression in Eisen Castle under the guise of historical narrative. Although such technical features are absent in the other Livonian tales, the whole series is permeated with Bestuzhev's obsessive hatred for feudalism in all its manifestations.

1. Cf. Pushkin's Ruslan i Lyudmila, p 26, in A.S. Pushkin, Poemy, M - 1964.

The Decembrists did not restrict themselves to emphasising the despondent position of the peasantry but in addition analysed the other existent social classes, thereby giving a substantial picture of the social structure in Russia. The nobility is the class which meets with scathing disapprobation from all quarters. Pestel' spoke of the "great advantages of the aristocracy, whom I considered, so to speak, as a wall which stood between the monarch and the people and which concealed for the sake of its own profit the true position of the people from the monarch".¹ Nikolay Bestuzhev included "the negligence in many cases of the noble classes"² in his list of causes of discontent. Nikita Murav'ev's Constitution stated categorically:

The Russian people, free and independent, is not and cannot be the property of any person or any family.³

The Decembrists wholly disapproved of the intolerable way in which the nobles treated their serfs and mismanaged their affairs. It was Bestuzhev, however, who gave the most succinct portrait of the nobility in his letter to the tsar:

1. Shchipanov, op. cit., vol. 2. p. 164.

2. Ibid. vol. 1. p. 437.

3. Ibid. p. 296.

It is divided into three categories : the enlightened, of whom the majority comprise the aristocracy; the literate, who either torture others like judges, or are themselves dragged through lawsuits; and finally, the ignorant, who live in villages, act as church elders, or are in retirement, having served, God knows how, in field regiments. Of these the ones owning small estates constitute the bane of Russia; always at fault and always grumbling, wishing to live not according to their income but according to their pretensions, they torture their poor peasants mercilessly. The others ruin themselves on hunting, trifles (i.e. chapels), life in the capital, or lawsuits. The majority of the highest nobility, serving in the army or in the capitals, demand luxury and entrust their estates to stewards, who fleece the peasants and deceive their masters, and thus 9/10 of the estates in Russia are ruined or mortgaged. *

Bestuzhev speaks fearlessly of the tyranny exercised by the nobility, who sold families unconcernedly, corrupted the wives of peasants, and burdened the peasants with corvées and quitrents. The position of the

peasants was rendered all the more grievous since "the repressive measures of the nobles became more and more perceptible (to the impoverished peasants) because they had begun to understand the rights of men". *

These ideas find ample reflection in Bestuzhev's fictional writings, predominantly in the Livonian tales whose fundamental keynote is the struggle against class privileges. Bestuzhev unreservedly censures the cupidity of the Baltic nobility, and the entire anti-feudal standpoint of these tales is interconnected with Bestuzhev's criticism of the prevailing system in Russia.

This is proved by reference to Bestuzhev's confessed abhorrence of Germanic influence in Russia. In his letter to the tsar, he wrote:

The preference for German names to Russian ones offended national pride. Then soldiers began to say: "why did we free Europe so as to impose its chains on ourselves?"**

The satirical song Our tsar is a Russian German is likewise indicative of Bestuzhev's attitude. Thus when Bestuzhev launches his assault on German barons, he is plainly representing the state of affairs in St. Petersburg, where the Baltic aristocracy occupied responsible

posts and influenced Alexander I's reactionary policy, and in Russia as a whole, where the impact of Prussian trends was inducing Alexander I to turn the country into one enormous barrack-square. Bestuzhev integrates in the Livonian tales every reprehensible aspect of contemporary Russia and makes it self-evident that the Livonia he describes is in truth the Russia of the early decades of the nineteenth century.

The prototype of the Russian noble is the German knight, whom Bestuzhev adequately sums up in Wenden Castle:

The knights who conquered Lithuania and subdued the savages invented everything which the Spaniards later repeated in the New World to the torment of an unarmed race. Death threatened the stubborn and degrading slavery served as a reward for submission the blood of innocent men flowed beneath the swords of warriors and the whips of masters. Arming themselves for sacred truth, the knights acted according to the dictates of grasping self-interest or brutal caprice. *

Personifying the repugnant attributes of these knights are Von Rorbach, Von Mey, Burtneck, Bruno Von Eisen, and Uxkull Von Reisenberg - by their very nature seemingly caricatures of Russian noble landowners. Bestiality

is the common property of each of them. This gallery of villains, versed in almost every vice known to man, has been described in previous paragraphs appertaining to the pitiful lot of the peasants. Thus a study of Bestuzhev's Livonian tales and travelogue as well as the agitational songs suffices to convey the relationship between serf and master, between peasant and noble, and comprises an indictment of no mean force.

The Decembrists did not ignore the development of the middle class in Russia, which in their opinion was called upon to play a crucial role in the economic stability of the country. They came forward as the defenders of a free middle class, a third class composed of merchants and petty bourgeoisie whose trading capacities should not be hindered. Nikolay Bestuzhev stressed the interior disorder and abuses in trade as being a main factor in the economic disintegration of Russia,¹ whilst Pestel¹ numbered the decline in trade, industry and general wealth amongst his list of aggravating defects in the Russian system.² Kakhovsky too felt compelled to expose these initial handicaps imposed upon Russia:

We need not be afraid of foreign enemies, but we have domestic enemies which harass the country: the absence of laws, of justice, the decline of commerce, heavy taxation and widespread poverty.³

1. Shchepanov, op. cit., vol. 1. p 435.

2. Ibid. vol. 2. p 164.

3. Borozdin, op. cit., p 30.

Bestuzhev's letter to the tsar did not omit to mention the hardships of the bourgeoisie:

The middle class is respected and important in all other countries; in our country this class is miserable, poor, burdened with obligations, deprived of means of a livelihood. *

He sympathetically details the causes of the dissatisfaction of the merchants:

Hampered by the guilds and impeded in means of delivery, they suffered grave losses: in 1812 many colossal fortunes were lost, others were upset. Business with the State ruined many merchants and contractors, and along with them their clients and creditors, by delay in payment, discounts and unjust niggardliness in receipt of goods

The precariousness of the tariff reduced many manufacturers to poverty, discouraged others and destroyed confidence in our government among our own as well as foreign merchants. The result of this was a still greater decline in our rate of exchange (i.e. foreign credit), proceeding from government duties, and the general complaint that there was no ready money. ***

The Reval Tournament is a clear example of Bestuzhev's application of political views to historical narrative. Edwin, as the representative of the merchant class, is here advanced to the centre of the story fully in the spirit of Decembrist loyalties. He is consequently revealed to be on a higher level than the nobles and knights, member as he is of the class which is to supersede all previous social forces. The knights have outlived their age and it is their turn to be displaced by a new class who have earned their right to dominance; the nobility lack all progressive inclinations and must give way to the merchants. Bestuzhev gives a historically far-sighted analysis of the dangers besetting the merchants, who can soon ruin themselves by excessive greed, and shows astute knowledge of social struggle:

Meanwhile the merchants, in general the most active, honourable, and useful class of all the inhabitants of Livonia, flattered by the easiness of becoming nobles through the purchase of immovable property or incited to eclipse the nobles in splendour, flung themselves into luxury. The nobles, so as not to yield to them and so as to compare ^{with} _^ the knights, exhausted their recently acquired estates. The knights, in a struggle with them both, mortgaged their castles, finally ruined their vassals, and a fatal outcome of this unnatural arrogance of the classes was

inevitable and not far off. Discord reigned everywhere; the weak undermined the strong, and the wealthy envied them. *

Edwin, belonging to a progressive class, is immeasurably superior to his antagonists. On the one side are the depraved, supercilious, ignorant, selfish knights, alongside whom stand the nobles - puerile and stupid. In order to emphasise their inferiority even further, Bestuzhev uses Edwin as his mouthpiece to satirise caustically the participants at the tournament. Opposite them is positioned Edwin - brave, sincere, faithful, thoughtful and yet impulsive:

He was able to dream and have feelings, but the Livonian knights could only arouse laughter and extremely rarely amuse He had grown accustomed to social proprieties and in education and astuteness surpassed with ease the knights of Livonia **

By virtue of his sympathetic portrayal of Edwin, Bestuzhev was putting forward his idea of a suitable replacement for such licentious, harsh and rapacious rulers. His defeat of Ungern in the tournament comes as the ultimate symbol of his victorious progress. This triumph leads to open warfare between the merchants and the knights and nobles, since merchants are not allowed to take part in the tournaments.

Thus the political tempo runs high, as Bestuzhev develops the whole conflict into a furious battle for supremacy.

It is possible to see the court in Neuhausen Castle as an expression of Bestuzhev's aversion to the legal system in Russia. It is a secret court, manipulated by the barons to dispense their own concept of justice, and is unfair, biased and inexorable in its judgments and sentences, favouring as it does the strong and mighty. The very description of the court-session is demonstrative of Bestuzhev's hatred of all the court stands for:

Four torches, thrust into the ground, cast a sort of greenish glow on the menacing faces of those present, and at each flicker of the flame, the shadows of the trees flitted like spectres across the glade. The members, leaning on their long swords, wrapped in cloaks, sat motionless, fixing their dull eyes on the accused. The sky was black, the sepulchral firs whispered in the wind, and when their noise was stilled, at times the splash of waves could be heard on the stones at the river's edge. *

The general situation in Russian society as a whole did not meet with the approval of the Decembrists, who set out to amend its sense of values by methods of education and enlightenment on the moral and cultural planes. Küchelbecker was grieved at the decline in standards among Russian society:

Gazing upon the shining qualities God bestowed upon the Russian people, a people foremost in the world for glory and might, for a sonorous, wealthy and mighty language, a people for which there is no equal in Europe finally as regards cordiality, kindness, wit and magnanimity, my heart was sad that all this was stifled and fading, and, perhaps, would soon fall without bearing any fruit in the moral world.¹

Bestuzhev was unable to contemplate Russian society without observing its manifold faults at all levels. In his letter to the tsar he depicts the widespread discontent of various layers of society:

Men of talent complained that the road in public service was blocked to them, because it demanded only silent submissiveness; men of learning at the fact that they were not allowed to teach, the youth at obstacles in learning.

1. Orlov, op. cit., p vi.

In a word, in all corners could be discerned dissatisfied faces; on the streets they shrugged their shoulders, everywhere they whispered - everyone said: "what will it lead to?" All elements were in ferment. The government alone carelessly slumbered over the volcano. *

An Imitation of Boileau's First Satire ** lists the defects which poison St. Petersburg society: insidiousness, boastfulness, deceit, slander, flattery, ignorance, arrogance; the despicable cluster of judges, clerks and spies is in evidence everywhere; many live a life of acquisition, affirming that their comfort is based on the avoidance of knowledge; the poor are obliged to bend the knee to the haughtiness of the rich; fools rise to the posts of directors; some flaunt the wealth they have stolen from neighbours; no one is willing to support the weak; talent is useless without patronage; artists are left to starve and suffer, friendless, impecunious and tattered. Bestuzhev multiplies instances of the impious and bovine behaviour which reigned in St. Petersburg, and the motif of escape runs through the poem, which ends:

I hasten to save myself from corruption.

Luxurious Babylon! For the last time farewell.

The first speech in Bestuzhev's extract from The Optimist * similarly lays bare the social deficiencies which the speaker considers intolerable. He sees evil and bad in everything without exception, in both the moral and physical worlds. Man is subject to torment, outer and inner changes, corporal and mental illnesses, the menacing elements of hostile nature, mutual bitterness between himself and others, wars, poison, execution, and different types of torturous deaths. Man himself has added to these disastrous phenomena by introducing into the world multifarious vices: innocence is committed to strength and wealth; virtue and honour are given into the control of others;

The sources of pleasures are lacklustre from satiety.

We are old at twenty, and dissolute at fifty.

Love is impossible to find, even in marriage; respect for women is lost; debts are not paid and vows are forgotten; literature is in a pitiful state as is the level of public criticism. This sincere outcry is terminated by the line:

All people in the world are spiteful,
and foolish, and miserable!

These verses are full of the energy and indignation of a young Russian noble, who feels revulsion at the surrounding milieu and cannot bear to look on idly while the young generation leads its aimless and dissipated life. Bestuzhev's hero is prompted not to despondency but to protest, not to disillusionment but to belief in the potential artistic powers of man, not to surrender but to conviction in the quest for some truth in life.

In "A Look at Old and New Literature in Russia" Bestuzhev outlines several points which contribute to the unhealthy condition of Russian literature and ascribes them to unsatisfactory social factors. There is neither concentration of opinions nor the cultivation of public taste because of the size of the empire; the universities, high schools, lyceums, institutes and colleges cannot deal with the huge population; the shortage of good teachers, expensiveness of books, small number of journals, does not permit the penetration of enlightenment into the districts, and not everyone is in a position to keep his children in the capitals;

the feudal temperament of many nobles causes them to treat knowledge with contempt, to be unwilling to torment their children with study - and this leaves children uneducated; the youth does not wish to bother itself with serious matters; the true writer and scholar is mocked; society insists on speaking French. *

Bestuzhev criticises Russian society of the early nineteenth century from the typical Decembrist viewpoint of honour, justice and integrity.

In Bestuzhev's aspiration to propagate Decembrist ideas in his fictional writing can be included the portrayal of Novgorod and its inhabitants. Novgorod for the Decembrists was the home of Russian democracy, liberty and free speech; they spoke of it often with yearning and pride. In the work of Bestuzhev, Novgorod and its heroes acquired a highly romanticised character. Roman, hero of Roman and Olga, is sketched with all the attributes of the model Novgorodian - handsome, good, a faithful and sincere servant of Novgorod, a skilful public speaker and adept conversationalist, daring and adventurous at tournaments and battles, clever, friendly, capable of arousing profound love, and finally the defender of the rights of Novgorod - willing to be the sacrifice of the cause he holds so near to his heart. It may be noted at this point that

such a person as Roman is Bestuzhev's idealistic conception of the perfect citizen, the opposite of the people he criticised in his poems. Berkut, the exiled robber from Novgorod who allies himself with Roman, appears as the butt of social mishap and is glorified as the knight of nobility, refined feelings and altruistic patriotism.

The assembly on the square in Novgorod denotes Bestuzhev's pre-occupation with the parliamentary system he visualised in Russia, where all voices could be heard, a representative senate combining all classes of the people.

Neuhausen Castle manifests the same theme, the image of the proud, gallant Novgorodian again standing out as a specimen of nobility and courage. Vseslav is described as follows:

His bold, carefree walk, his honest face and quick glances assured one of his nobility. *

His conduct matches his appearance, for he is not loth to defend his honour when it is at stake. Accused of treachery and ingratitude by his host and protector, Ewald Von Nordeck, he does not hesitate to challenge the latter to a duel. Further, when his honour is questioned, he retorts -

"You Germans inscribe it on your coats of arms, but we guard it in our hearts". *

As he disarms the murderous Romuald Von Mey, he is compared to "an angel of revenge", ** and both he and his brother Andrey are portrayed as valiant heroes, swooping to the rescue of their sister from dishonour and Nordeck from certain death. The services of these natives of Novgorod extend even further as international diplomats and peace-makers. By taking advantage of the aid proffered by an Estonian helmsman to guide them across the water, they stress the fact that friendship and unity in a common cause between Russians and Estonians is possible.

One of the ritual songs written by Bestuzhev commences with the departure of a peasant from Novgorod; armed with an axe, he is bent on sudden and drastic revenge. *** It is from Novgorod, the symbol of equality and freedom, that the liberators of Russia will come in their march against despotism.

The ideologists of the Northern Society were faced with two difficult problems: whether to take up arms alone in the name of the people, or to permit the participation of the people in military revolution, and secondly, the manner of revenge to be handed out to

the tsar. The work of Bestuzhev is an important proof of their hesitations concerning these questions. The Livonian tales provide one solution and the agitational songs another. In Wenden Castle Wigbert Von Serrat stands up for the downtrodden vassals and acts like a Decembrist noble, taking the part of the people but refusing to allow the people to fight for itself. He is unable to contemplate human suffering and stand aside whilst the work of the peasants is destroyed and their rights are denied them. He rises to accomplish his personal vengeance on behalf of the people. In Neuhausen Castle Vseslav and Andrey, in Decembrist fashion, are ever-ready to punish tyranny and unscrupulousness; the Estonian hatred of their German taskmasters is clearly stated, and by killing Von Mey, they are indirectly behaving in the capacity of champions of tormented humanity. In The Reval Tournament the people never have a role to play, never take up arms against their oppressors; the struggle is commenced by the superior merchant Edwin, who intercedes for the sake of justice. The people remain in the shadows in accordance with ~~this~~ side of Decembrist thought. In Eisen Castle it is Reginald who redresses wrong by murdering his uncle. He

pronounces, deaf to Bruno's pleas for pity -

"Now you are in my hands, villain! Your end has come. Neither ask nor expect any mercy from ~~me~~ me, brother, for you yourself never showed any." *

His implacable revenge gives rise to great rejoicing among the people and he becomes an avenger for their violated rights.

While the argument went on as to the potentiality of the people as a revolutionary force, the leaders of the Northern Society had the utmost trouble in dissuading Yakubovich and Kakhovsky from assassinating the tsar. Yakubovich desired revenge for personal grievance, for insults to himself; Kakhovsky was impatient for a signal to commence action, a blow against autocracy. Both these reasons were unacceptable to Rylayev and Bestuzhev, who contemplated a social vengeance founded on the theory that every political deed must be conscious, premeditated, and intended for the social good, and not a matter of individual rage or momentary flare of passion.

The individualistic effort of Von Serrat in killing Von Rorbach is a vain one:

The magistrate no longer existed, but his power remained. ***

The murder of this single tyrant did not achieve the extirpation of feudalism. Bestuzhev's condemnation of Von Serrat's act is tempered somewhat with extenuating circumstances:

I hate the villain in Serrat, but can I utterly fail to sympathise with an unhappy man who was carried away by the spirit of a barbaric age and by the force of a despair which seized him? *

Bestuzhev's lesson for contemporary times is that only concerted rebellion, openly accomplished, can destroy the evils of serfdom and free the Russian nation.

In the same way Reginald's murder of Bruno is approved by Bestuzhev only in the sense that it benefited the people;

Bruno died, and deservedly; he was guilty; **

no punishment is meted out to Reginald who "rid the neighbourhood of a villain". ***

However, Bestuzhev treats Reginald's motives

with reserve and even criticism:

Why did he lack the will to refuse resolutely (to plunder) or to rebel against him openly?But no, he did not stand up for the oppressed until he was personally offended; he only rebelled to save his own skin. *

Although Reginald's action was beneficial, it arose out of selfish interests. Any such deed which profits humanity should be based on humanitarian grounds, and thereby achieve a sort of moral purity.

In conclusion, the difference of opinion between pre-revolutionary critics and Soviet critics can now be resolved. The former have taken Bestuzhev's tales at their face value and have neglected the deeper underlying meanings; this is understandable, since the tales themselves can be read quite easily on the purely fictional level and since the character of Bestuzhev gave adequate grounds for the surmisal of his lack of seriousness. The latter have assumed the revolutionary ideology of Bestuzhev's tales but over-stated his significance as a political figure; although an incisive observer and a brave revolutionary, Bestuzhev was far from being a man of great political stature.

(a) Pushkin and Western European Literature.

PART III

It would be inadvisable to study Pushkin's early work without explicit reference to the influence of both Western European literary

Chapter VI

reasonable Russian writing on it. The attitude, favored by most contemporary Soviet critics, of ignoring the obvious, would mean that Pushkin isolated himself from the potent forces molding the development of the Russian novel, and wrote, as to speak,

Aesthetic Considerations.

in a vacuum, unimpacted and unaffected by Western authors. This opinion is tantamount to the ludicrous assertion that the leading

1) Thematics.

Russian literary critic, a foremost activist in the literary circles of his day, the writer whom Belinsky called "our first story-teller", "the instigator of the Russian tale",¹ allowed himself to be cut off from the most important literary revolutions of his time - the overthrow of classicism, the advent of sentimentalism, and the final triumph of romanticism. He was the *homme de lettres* to whom Pushkin wrote deferentially, "I admit that there is no one I like to agree with more than you and Vyazemsky - only you two can excite me",² on the 17th. June 1823, and when even a year earlier, on that 21st. June, 1822, Pushkin had proclaimed "the representative of taste and the true guard and patron of our literature",³

1. Belinsky, op. cit., vol. I. p 272.

2. Pushkin, *Sobremennye russkiye. v literat. izvestiia*, M - 1962, vol. 9. p 44.

3. Ibid. p 40.

(a) Bestuzhev and Western European Literature.

It would be inconceivable to study Bestuzhev's early work without emphatic reference to the influence of both Western European literary trends and fashionable Russian writing on it. The attitude, favoured by most contemporary Soviet critics, of ignoring the obvious, would mean that Bestuzhev isolated himself from the cogent forces welding the development of the romantic movement and wrote, so to speak, in a vacuum, unimpressed and unaffected by Western authors. This opinion is tantamount to the ludicrous assertion that the leading Russian literary critic, a foremost activist in the literary circles of his day, the writer whom Belinsky called "our first story-teller", "the instigator of the Russian tale"; ¹ allowed himself to be cut off from the most important literary revolutions of his time - the overthrow of classicism, the advent of sentimentalism, and the final triumph of romanticism. He was the homme de lettres to whom Pushkin wrote deferentially, "I admit that there is no one I like to argue with more than you and Vyazemsky - only you two can excite me", ² on the 13th. June 1823, and whom even a year earlier, on the 21st. June, 1822, Pushkin had proclaimed "the representative of taste and the true guard and patron of our literature"; ³

1. Belinsky, op. cit., vol. 1. p 272.

2. Pushkin, Sobraniye sochineniy, v desyati tomakh, M - 1962, vol.9. p 67.

3. Ibid. p 40.

he had been appointed censor of bibliography in the Free Society of the Lovers of Russian Literature, whose secretary, A. A. Nikitin, wrote to him in highly respectful terms on the 4th April, 1821, appreciating his "talents, zeal and labours", praising him as "one of the society's most honoured and worthy members", entreating further literary endeavour from his pen. ⁴ 1 All these remarks of his contemporaries stamp Bestuzhev as the sort of writer who would take an active interest in the literary fashions of Western Europe.

The present argument cannot be assumed as irrefutable nor can Bestuzhev's work be read from this viewpoint until a thorough look has been taken at the exact potency and spread of W. European literature in Russia during the early decades of the nineteenth century, the extent of Bestuzhev's own captivation with it, and finally the precise opinion Bestuzhev had of Karamzin, the symbolic figurehead of the sentimentalist movement in Russia, whose links with W. European writers were of a very strong nature.

The new sources of poetic work existed in Western European models which replaced the literature of pseudo-classicism. Russian acquaintance with these models was commenced almost exclusively

1. IRLI, AN SSR, Bumagi Bestuzhevykh, Arkh. No 3 (5572).

by means of journalism, which supplied readers with both translations and critical reviews of the recent works of W. European literature.

In V. Sopikov's bibliography, dealing with writers before 1813,¹ an overwhelming quantity of numbers falls to certain authors, and Ann Radcliffe is allotted a total of twenty five.

M. Dmitriyev attempted to account for the extensive popularity of Ann Radcliffe, whose novels of mystery and horror, along with those of Walpole, Lewis, and so on, were so widespread at the beginning of the 19th. century:

But no one enjoyed such fame as Mrs. Radcliffe! The terrible and the sentimental - here finally were two kinds of reading to suit most the taste of the public. Reading of this type at last replaced former books. Besides, Sir Walter Scott, in his biography of Mrs. Radcliffe, lavishes great praise on her novels, particularly on her art of exciting the imagination of readers intensely.....I remember too the reading of novels in the countryside..... What horror was spread by the celebrated Mrs. Radcliffe!²

1. V. Sopikov, Opyt rossiyskoy bibliografii do 1813, SPb. 1813 - 1821.

2. M. Dmitriyev, Melochi iz zapasa moyey pamyati, M. 1857. pp. 25 - 27.

Even the least enthusiastic lovers of reading did not go without the novels of Ann Radcliffe:

She read very little: in her hands could be seen only the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe;

this is how one author sketches the average reader at the beginning of the century. ¹

Another avid reader recounts in her memoirs that she found in the library of her uncle the works of ~~her uncle~~ Radcliffe, which delighted her. ² According to the testimony of Zagoskin, in the provinces at the beginning of the nineteenth century the novels of Ann Radcliffe were current reading. ³

Bestuzhev, as one of the most literate men of his day, could not have failed to read the works of Ann Radcliffe. In fact, in Another Page from the Diary of a Guards Officer, he parodies the horror novels, making special mention of the name of Ann Radcliffe:

" Our journey makes a fine scene for a horror novel, " I said to my comrade laughing. " Yes, and the night is most Radcliffian ", he replied; " it's blacker than a horse of the sixth squadron; all that's missing is a den and robbers." *

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1. Russkiy Arkhiv, 1893, Book 1 : Yelizaveta Petrovna Glebova - Streshneva, according to the memoirs of her grand-daughter, Natal'ya Petrovna Brevern.
 2. Russkiy Arkhiv, 1899, Book 111: Vospominaniya Praskov'i Nikolayevny Tatlinoy.
 3. M.N. Zagoskin, Sobraniye sochineniy, SPb. 1889, vol. 1. p 8.

Sir Walter Scott too reached a zenith of popularity in the 1820's. In A. Smirdin's library were 23 numbers of Scott, comprising extracts or complete novels. Of those likely to have influenced Bestuzhev before 1825 were The Fugitive, 1821; Rokeby, The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Kenilworth, 1823; The Legend of Montrose, Guy Mannering, The Black Dwarf, Scottish Puritans, Gustav Waldheim, 1824; The Bridal of Triermain, The Abbot, The Antiquary, Edinburgh Gaol, 1825.¹ The novels of Scott in the 20's received the full attention of the Russian public. His The Fugitive appeared also in Plavil'shchikov's library, printed as early as 1821.² And from 1821 dramatic adaptations from the novels of Scott were made by Prince Shakhovskoy, including Ivanhoe or the Return of Richard the Lionheart (21st. January, 1821), The Black Dwarf or the Vale of the Black Stone (23rd. October, 1822), The Pirate or Magic is not what it Seems (1823).³

Scott was known and loved in all circles of Russian society; his heroes and themes were commonly discussed, argued over, compared, referred to. The same A. A. Shakhovskoy wrote to his pupil Lyubovya Osipovna Dyur:

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1. Rospis' rossiyskim knigam dlya chteniya iz biblioteki Aleksandra Smirdina. SPb. 1828 - 1847.
 2. Rospis' rossiyskim knigam dlya chteniya iz biblioteki V. Plavil'shchikova. SPb. 1820 - 1821.
 3. P. Arapov, Letopis' Russkogo Teatra. SPb. 1861.

I am glad, my dear friend, that you have taken a liking to reading, and I am ^rvery pleased that you seem to have become extremely attached to Walter Scott I very much want you to read The Antiquary, it will remind you of some scenes between me and my nephew, Prince Ivan. To tell the truth, Walter Scott vexed me a little in his novel; but one good turn deserves another; I myself mutilated him in The Black Dwarf - so we are quits! 1

Scott was read zealously by all and sundry; mature people "by reading his novels refreshed their souls", Karamzin wrote to Count S.P. Rumyantsev on the 20th. June, 1822 ² and young people looked on them for guidance in the education of the soul, said T.P. Passek in his memoirs. ³

Often romanticism entered the life of Russian high society only as an adornment, as a decorative addition to the routine of everyday life. Scott played no mean part in this activity, for one contemporary relates that at high society balls, especially at court, "they loved to take costumes from poems, English and German dramas, and particularly from the novels of Walter Scott". ⁴

1. P.A. Karatygin, Zapiski, 1805 - 1879, SPb. 1880, p 168.

2. Russkiy Arkhiv, 1869, p 592.

3. Russkaya Starina, 1873, vol. 7 p 299.

4. Zapiski A.O. Smirnovoy, Part 2. SPb 1897, p 49.

translations have appeared "of the beautiful novels of Walter Scott" *
and a year later again makes notice of the publication of several
translations of Scott's novels. ** In one of his characteristic
complaints at the incursion of French, German and English
literature into Russia from 1812, he gives a special prominence
to the name of Scott. *** He indicates the efforts of Russian
authors to imitate Scott when he parodies those authors who used
to claim, "I am the Russian Walter Scott". ****

Bestuzhev shows how widely disseminated were Scott's novels
in various references in his tales; in The Test he says that
Scott's novels could be found in a country landowner's home, *****
and in The Clock and the Mirror that they were to be seen in the
boudoir of a society beauty in the capital. ***** In "N. Polevoy's
novel An Oath at the Lord's Grave" he explains further:

Walter Scott decided the inclination of the century towards
historical details, created the historical novel, which now
became the requirement of the whole reading world, from the
walls of Moscow to Washington, from the study of the grandee
to the counter of the petty trader. *****

In an important reference to Scott which will go a long way to prove with what aspects precisely of Scott's narratives Bestuzhev was impressed, he assures readers:

The genius of Walter Scott guessed at the domestic life and everyday mind of chivalric timesWalter Scott sprinkled them with the living water of his artistic imagination, breathed into their nostrils, said "live" - and they came to life, with the flush of life on their cheeks, with the beat of reality in their breasts. They are not ~~the~~ creatures from the grave, with the ashes of decay on their bodies on the contrary, they are living people, with their petty passions, beliefs, habits, favourite sayings. He spread out antiquity before us, but did not bring it to us, rather he bore us into it, compelled us to love, fight, revel, drink, be cowardly, together with his heroes and for his heroes Walter Scott is not a romantic by virtue of subject matter, but he is a romantic by manner of exposition, by forms, by the Sternian spirit of the analysis of all the movements of the soul, all the actions of the will. He does not say like idealism, "why?", but he says "because" and "for that reason". His very point of view on antiquity proves that he is a poet. *

Contemporary critics were able to see plainly the presence of Scott's influence in the tales of Bestuzhev. Pushkin at the end of May, 1825, wrote to Bestuzhev: "Your tournament reminds me of Walter Scott's Tournament". ¹

The name of Byron first appeared on the pages of Russian print as early as 1815. In the first number of the journal Rossiyskiy Muzeum the first information about Byron was published, accompanied by extracts from his poem The Corsair, both in the original and in a prose translation, under the heading Morskoy Razboynik v tryokh pesnyakh, sochineniye lorda Birona. ²

The name of Byron, spelt either Байрон, Бейрон or Бирон, occurred more often, and in 1818 an article on Byron translated from the French found its way onto the pages of Vestnik Yevropy, entitled "Oboznaniye nyneshnego sostoyaniya angliyskoy literatury". ³

From 1819 the name of Byron not only began to appear more and more frequently in print, but became the centre of attention of the foremost literary circle. From the beginning of 1819 Zhukovsky, Kozlov and Vyazemsky became interested in and attracted by Byron. ⁴

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1. A.S. Pushkin, Sobraniye sochineniy v desyati tomakh, M.1962.vol.9. p 160
 2. Rossiyskiy Muzeum, 1815, part 1, No. 1.
 3. Vestnik Yevropy, 1818, No. 9, pp 35 - 52.
 4. Ostaf'evskiy Arkhiv, vol. 1. 1899, p 286, 326 -327, 334, 336, 338, etc. & K.Y. Grot, Dnevnik I.I. Kozlova, 1906, pp 8 - 9.

Independently of these poets, Batyushkov, then in Italy, was enamoured of Byron. On the 3rd. October, 1819, Batyushkov wrote to A. I. Turgenev about this, and the latter on the 7th January, 1820, communicating the contents of Batyushkov's letter to Vyazemsky, remarked:

The Italians, like you - the dwellers on the Vistula and the Neva, are translating the poems of Byron and reading them eagerly..... consequently from the North to the South they delight in Byron. ¹

In Plavil'shchikov's library was a selection from the works of Byron made in 1821, ² and in Smirdin's library five numbers were devoted to Byron. ³ The influence of Byron was undoubted and widely acknowledged; his Russian admirers often "thought together with him" and even lived "with his mind and soul", as a letter from Count A.G. Laval' affirmed to Kozlov on the 10th. February, 1831. ⁴

Moskovskiy Telegraf thought highly of Byron and treated him with the utmost veneration. N.Polevoy called him "the great Byron, that extraordinary phenomenon in the moral world of our time". ⁵

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1. Ostaf'evskiy Arkhiv, vol. 2. 1899. p 5.
 2. M. Kachenovsky, Vybor iz sochineniy Lorda Beyrona, M, 1821, in Rospis' rossiyskim knigam iz biblioteki V. Plavil'shchikova.
 3. Rospis' rossiyskim knigam iz biblioteki Aleksandra Smirdina.
 4. Russkiy Arkhiv, 1836, vol. 1.
 5. Moskovskiy Telegraf, 1825, part 1, addendum to "The Character of Lord Byron" from Sir Walter Scott.

Admiring Byron as an original genius, Moskovskiy Telegraf stated that he had had no small measure of influence on European literature:

One is all contemporaneity, the contemporary lyre and epic poem, the laments of hopelessness, the bloody comet of new poetry, a jolting electric shock. Readers will guess the name of Byron. ¹

Vyazemsky wrote on the 25th. February, 1821 regarding Byron's revolutionary romanticism:

Byron, who soars in the clouds, descends to earth so as to loose his indignation against oppressors, and the colours of his romanticism are often blended with political colours
A Poet must sometimes seek inspiration in the newspapers. ²

Some inkling of the furore caused by the meteoric rise of Byron's fame can be given by observing the sharp rebuff which met Russian Byronism from the reactionaries, the preservers of literary and social antiquity. The letter of D.P. Rumich to the editors of Russkiy Invalid, dated 23rd. April, 1820, seethes with indignation that this journal should have spoiled its good reputation by including an article about Byron, translated from the French journal Le Conservateur:

1. Moskovskiy Telegraf, 1833, part XLIX "O sochineniyakh A.S. Pushkina".

2. Ostaf'evskiy Arkhiv, vol. 2. 1899. pp 170 - 171.

What need has it of the poisonous, infectious dreams of French, English and German poets, philologists and philosophers?

He called Byron "the English godless poet, whose gloomy and furious soul and reason disfigured by self-esteem are inflamed and illuminated by a hellish fire!" He continued: "Whosoever is infected by the ravings of Byron is lost for ever; his poems are full of fatal poison and a philosophy which can be mouthed by hell alone. Thus, to glorify the poetry of Lord Byron is tantamount to praising and exalting a murderous weapon, perfected to kill humanity!".¹

If Bestuzhev admired Scott, then his love for Byron was boundless. He took pains to acquaint himself with the works of Byron, admitting to his sisters in a letter of the 30th. September, 1824:

I am reading Byron and racking my brains over him,^{*}
and in his diary for 1824 noting on the 31st. August:

I still read Byron assiduously. What a fiery soul he has!^{**}
Moreover he availed himself of every opportunity for discussing the English

1. Russkaya Starina, 1896, vol. 4, p 135.

poet, an entry in his diary dated the 7th. January, 1824 affording the information:

I had a lively conversation about Byron; *

and his anecdote Acquaintance with Griboyedov furnished us with his account of his discussion on Byron with Griboyedov in August 1824. **

In an article on Russian literature he waxed enthusiastic over the social significance of Byron's poetry, exclaiming,

(Alfieri and) the matchless Byron proudly cast off the golden chains of fortune, scorned all the allurements of high-society - in return the whole world lies at their feet and an eternal day of glory is their inheritance. ***

Furthermore in a letter to Pushkin on the 9th. March, 1825, he pointed out the vital attributes of Byron's poetry which he found so stimulating and so close to his personal notions on the value of literature, namely social depiction, subtle characterisation, and satirical treatment of both:

You grasped St. Petersburg society, but did not penetrate it.
Read Byron; he without knowing our St. Petersburg, described it more exactly, where a profound knowledge of people was concerned.

Even his artificial rhetoric contains philosophical remarks, and there is no need to speak of his satire. I know no man who could sketch characters better than he, more picturesquely than he, or seize new sparks of passions or petty passions in them. And how cruel and fresh is his satire! "

His letter to Vyazemsky of the 17th. June, 1824, mourns the loss of Byron as a fellow-poet, a champion of humanity, and an ideologist of literature. His ensuing words of sorrow reveal the devout worshipper of Byron he had become:

"Death has torn from the sky this golden star", and a sort of desperate echo of his fall has resounded in the hearts of all sensible people. I could not, I did not want to believe it, I expected that it was a journalistic death, that it was a calculated invention on the part of journalists, but it was the truth, the terrible truth. He is dead, but what an enviable death he died for Greece, if not for the Greeks, who in a bloody font washed away their former shame. He bequeathed to mankind great truths, in his amazing talent, but in his nobility of spirit he is an example to lofty poets. And slander pursued this giant, and envy drove him from his fatherland, and both poisoned the air of his native land; history will rank him among the few men who were not attracted by passion for self-gain, but who acted for the good of all mankind. **

It is a highly interesting coincidence that Bestuzhev's own brother, Mikhail, when talking of his literary aspirations, confessed:

When the appearance of Byron's poems turned all heads, I wrote many plays in imitation of him: they contained castles, and Livonian knights, and maidens, and Novgorodians. ¹

all, strangely enough, aspects of Bestuzhev's tales. If Bestuzhev's brother had imitated Byron and others, why not Bestuzhev himself?

Bestuzhev's closeness to Byron did not pass unnoticed by his contemporaries either. Pushkin advised him in 1825:

enough of your writing rapid tales with romantic transitions - this is alright for a Byronic poem ²

with particular reference to his tale The Traitor. Another story, Night on Board Ship, received identical treatment; it was said of it, "Night on Board Ship can be compared to a poem of Byron's". ³ In fact at all times Bestuzhev's reliance on foreign models was strongly stressed by contemporary critics.

1. Vospominaniya Bestuzhevskikh, p 284.

2. A. S. Pushkin, Sobraniye sochineniy v desyati tomakh, M - 1962, vol. 9 p 160.

3. Moskovskiy Telegraf, 1833, part 49, p 328.

If there still remain any lingering doubts as to the actual influence brought to bear on Bestuzhev's writing by Radcliffe, Scott and Byron, they may be dispelled once and for all by his announcement to Pushkin on the 9th. March, 1825:

I thirstily gulp in English literature and my soul is grateful to the English language: it taught me to think, it directed me to nature, it is an inexhaustible spring! I am even prepared to say: il n'y a point de salut hors la littérature anglaise. *

If Bestuzhev, that most eclectic of writers, borrowed (to put it briefly) atmosphere from Radcliffe, manner of historical narrative from Scott, and characterisation, social satire, rhetoric from Byron, then it was to Karamzin that he turned for style and a certain type of sentimentalism. Sentimentalism, or pre-romanticism, attained the forefront in England, France and Germany during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Karamzin in the 1790's became the leader of the Russian sentimentalists, and his sentimentalism followed the lines of Sterne's and Rousseau's.¹ In spite of the fact that Bestuzhev often had many harsh things to say of Karamzin the historian and Karamzin the prose-writer, in spite of the fact that he consciously tried to move away from the Karamzinian movement of sensibility towards a more

1. P. Berkov and G. Makogonenko, "Zhizn' i tvorchestvo N.M. Karamzina" in N.M. Karamzin, Izbrannyye sochineniya, M - L, 1964, vol. 1. p 16.

concrete, Decembrist outlook, yet he found it impossible to escape the effects of Karamzin's revolution in prose and hyper-sentimentality in plot development and story construction. On numerous occasions he expressed open admiration for Karamzin's achievements in the realm of stylistics:

Karamzin shone on the horizon of prose, like a rainbow after a flood. He transformed the Russian book language, resonant, rich, powerful in essence, but already suffering in the hands of ungifted writers and ignorant translators. He moved the rusty wheels of its mechanism by introducing successful novelty, discarded foreign diversity in words and word-combinations, and gave it a national physiognomy the debt of truth and the gratitude of his contemporaries will crown this eloquent writer, who, with his charming, colourful style, accomplished a decisive revolution in the Russian language, for the better: *

Speaking of Karamzin's History of the Russian State, he selects for praise the virtues of style and sensitivity:

What can be said about the perfection of the style, the power of the feelings! These qualities reach higher and higher, like an eagle soaring from a mountain peak into the sky, *

and in the same context:

we can see the freshness and strength of the style, the attraction of the story, and the variety in the cast and the sonority of turns of speech, so obedient under the hand of genuine talent. **

Radcliffe, Scott and Byron were the chief sources of inspiration but it must be remembered that these figureheads were only a part of the larger framework of European romanticism. It is not sufficient to isolate their work and discuss ~~its~~ connection with the work of Bestuzhev. To do this would mean that Bestuzhev lacked any individuality of his own as a writer, and secondly, that he was not aware of other European writers. This would be totally unjust, since Bestuzhev's own personality played a significant role in the creation of his stories, and his articles contain frequent references to other representatives of the romantic movement in Europe. It is to these broader horizons that we must now turn, not excluding the vital issue of Bestuzhev's own character.

By nature of a powerful and passionate individuality, Bestuzhev's ego sought to soar above ordinary affairs and to create something lasting

and universal. This element of romantic individuality exists in his work in all circumstances and constitutes the first distinguishing feature of his writing. With regard to characterisation, this feature becomes obvious when we compare the thoughts of the heroes of his tales with his own thoughts in his letters. Even the form of his heroes' speeches often coincide with Bestuzhev's phrases. In a letter to his brother Pavel, he wrote of the feelings he had experienced as follows:

My heart is pure more ardent than constant, and, perhaps,
more sensual than tender, I wasted the years in procrastination,
almost always happy *

Idin, in A Second Evening on a Bivouac, gives tongue to the same reflections:

"I am young, but I have lived, I have felt, I have experienced
delight!" **

and in Evening on a Bivouac, the same character admits:

"My story is entertaining for me alone, because it is full of
feelings only, and not adventures". ***

In general Bestuzhev's heroes often share his ideas and speak his words, whether regarding bravery and love for the fatherland, or passions and shattered hopes. In a letter dated the 16th. December, 1831, Bestuzhev affirmed:

Only two treasures have I borne from the flood : pride of soul
and tenderness for all that is beautiful. *

Vladimir Sitsky bewails the disillusion that engulfs him when he learns that the goodness and beauty he had cherished are mere spectres of the imagination, unrealisable in reality:

"So everything good and beautiful in the world is only a story,
only an empty dream; only in sleep are men ready for the great
and the noble". **

The accounts of the Decembrist revolution exhibit Bestuzhev's unflinching courage, and the immense bravery displayed by such characters as Ovechkin and Shcherbina is an instance of the affinity between him and his fictional heroes. In his portrayal of certain of them it is not difficult to perceive the portrait of Bestuzhev himself. Sometimes Bestuzhev utterly fuses himself with the personality of his hero and in his image describes not only his recollections on the past but also

his presentiments concerning the future, according them his individual frame of mind as well as his ideas, phrases and words. In this respect Bestuzhev widely used his own observations on surrounding reality, and hence the personal aspect of his work was always to the fore.

However, Bestuzhev needed a system of literature to express his personal meditations and his Decembrist ideals on the purpose of art; therefore he sought original and powerful forms for the expression of his ego. The old literary school could not satisfy him in this quest, and so he turned to romanticism, since his natural individualism found great kinship in romantic individualism. Romanticism was not limited to individualism, but embraced two other tenets which Bestuzhev essayed to introduce into his work - nationality and universality.

The first of these tenets, individualism, had its origins in the struggle against classical reason. Reason in the classical sense was universal, eternal and immutable; it was objective and curtailed all excesses of inspiration and originality, thereby imposing design, measure, harmony and symmetry on literature. Romanticism was imagination and feeling as opposed to this classical concept of the reason. It gave precedence to the right of the imagination to create its own worlds and people or to reject reality in the quest for an ideal. Rousseau rebelled against the dry, abstract rationalism of

the 18th. century and emphasised the importance of the feelings, which suddenly became the guidelines of life. For him, knowledge and conduct were based on feeling. Feeling therefore allowed the writer to become a natural genius, unfettered by the classical doctrines of the unities; the untrammelled artist was likewise the concept of Goethe, who believed that the highest art proceeded from an inspiration above earthly control; of Shelley, who spoke of "unpremeditated art" as the loftiest product of the human mind; and of Wordsworth who referred to the best poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".

This belief in the subjective imagination went hand in hand with the contemporary belief in the individual self. Previously it had proved well-nigh impossible for personal sentiments to break through the obstructive barriers of the state and social order. But now the poet, with his regained personality, found the power to overthrow the obstacles in his path and advance his own invincible ego. Romanticism being to such an extent the literature of subjectivity, it was natural that all the pre-romantics and romantics constructed their own selves in their literary characters. They built the image of their hero into a higher nature, a superior being who became a cult of the romantic epoch. Chateaubriand embodied his homme supérieur in René, Constant in Adolphe, Goethe in Werther, Shelley in his mythical giant Prometheus or his Count Cenci, Byron in Cain and

Manfred. It was the latter two poets who created such titanic figures with especial vividness. Byron delighted and astonished all who came into contact with his poetry, and the type of the Byronic superman amazed the whole of contemporary society and was accepted as an ideal and pattern.

Sometimes it is the kind of hero who does not withdraw from society but lives in it as a mystical, satanic being, wreathed in melancholy, bearing a wound within himself, possessing an impenetrable secret; sometimes the kind who leaves the society hateful to him, as René flees to the forests of America, Childe Harold departs on a pilgrimage through Europe, or Aleko goes to a gypsy encampment.

Bestuzhev's heroes belong to the first category; they remain in society and their conflicts are waged within its framework. Pitting themselves against society whether they side with good or evil or pitting themselves against other characters for the love of a woman, they always manifest an inborn belief in the moral rectitude of their actions and never question the fallibility of their subjective convictions.

Romantic heroes may be classified into two further sorts - the active titan and the philosophical titan. Both find themselves at odds with society but solve this impasse in diametrically opposed ways. Saint-Preux, Werther, René, Childe Harold and Manfred are dreamers who are tortured by spiritual needs that cannot be satisfied,

by passions that cannot be appeased. They are rebels against life but only in a passive sense. Instead of rising up in arms against the society that oppresses them they allow the initiative to be wrested out of their hands and sink into disenchantment, suffering, solitude, réverie, melancholy and pessimism. Senancour's Obermann is extremely characteristic of this philosophical type of hero; he wastes his energies in negative contemplation because he suffers from paralysis of the will. He is at all times calm and indifferent,⁴ a wastrel who never indulges in cries of despair, wrath or complaint but passes his serene judgment on the grief and futility of human life and endeavour. Self-analysis is his sole diversion. René is another who is prey to atrophy of the will; he is afflicted by vague passions and incomprehensible melancholy. His whole life and outlook are spoiled by his scepticism, which forces him to review every one of his emotions, thereby rendering him incapable of any action and allergic to any useful work. Werther's passive temperament leaves him unequipped to cope with the problems he encounters; his sentimental love of nature, rural life, children, solitude and poetry is an inadequate protection against the buffets of fate. He succumbs in the unequal struggle, his strength deserting him at the vital moment.

Saint - Preux's spiritual flabbiness, his lack of will-power in the struggle for happiness, and his passivity in the face of circumstances, mean that he is exhausted under the burden of melancholy, love and virtue. His battle is lost before it is begun.

The second sort of romantic hero - the active titan, is a man of action who takes his fate into his own hands and breaks out of the shackles imposed on him by society, even if it means setting himself beyond the laws of society, which then brands him as an outlaw or criminal. Karl Moor despises the conventions, injustices and prejudices of the social system and declares war upon it with an inflexible will and indomitable hatred. He is endowed with energy, which he uses to proclaim the rights of the individual against the corruption of society. The robber was a common figure in romantic literature; like Karl Moor, Nodier's Jean Sbogar is an energetic man who finds in crime the only outlet for his passionate heart and iron will. He is the enemy of society and wars with it accordingly. Marmaduke in Wordsworth's The Borderers is a noble minded outlaw akin in position to Moor and Sbogar, and Caleb Williams in the novel of the same name secures temporary asylum in a den of robbers, who are possessed of virtues unknown to the rulers of the country.

We can guess that Byron's Corsair, Giaour and Lara are guilty of some crime which has made them outcasts from society. They do everything on the grand scale; they deal death and suffering indiscriminately, feeling both fated and fatal. Their revolt is not confined to vain shouts of anguish, but is a bloodthirsty combat for the sake of vengeance on society and self-promotion.

It is with the second type of romantic character that the heroes of Bestuzhev may be identified. Roman is unafraid of captivity, torture and death when he is concerned for the welfare of his country. Edwin pits his strength and skill against the accomplished knights in the tournament so as to give evidence of his valour. Von Rorbach and Von Serrat are unwilling to submit at any cost and carry out their dire threats of destruction without a quaver. Baron Bruno Von Eisen knows no master; he dashes everyone and everything on the rock of his own esteem. It takes his revengeful nephew Reginald to put an end to his wilful brutality with a similar act of unrestrained murder. Berkut, the robber friend of Roman, is an outlaw of noble heritage who shows the qualities of hospitality, generosity and kindness in his life apart from society. Von Mey is a Tartuffe-like imposter who spends his time inveigling his way into the trust of his host, only so as to execute his dastardly plans all the more effectively. All of them are bold and alert, given to action

rather than introspection, to rash optimism rather than morose pessimism. They will be commented on later at greater length in the section of Byronic influence.

Individualism did not preclude the notion of improving society. In fact, the romantics were always obsessed with the idea of renovating society and re-creating it according to new principles. This romantic socialism was nothing but the romantic poetisation of future human life. It was clearly and concretely elucidated by Werther, Karl Moor, Marquis Posa, Prometheus, and other independently powerful individuals who joined battle with obsolete modes of life and preached a new human society, founded on the notions of complete freedom, truth and beauty. They enunciated visions of new religion, science, art, family life and justice, destined to replace outmoded European civilisation. Writers desired the betterment of the society into which they were born, and brought into play all castles of society. They no longer concentrated, like the classicists, on the high-born, the kings and princes, the nobles and aristocrats, but saw fit to pay attention to people of a humbler bent - the peasant, the trader, the seaman or the soldier. Although the social novel proper was still not yet under way, the seeds of it were sown by romanticism with its interest in the differing social classes. Rousseau and Chateaubriand were attracted by the Noble Savage; the common people were allotted much space by Gray, Wordsworth, Goethe, Scott and Burns.

Bestuzhev's stories also fit into this pattern. His heroes try to right the injustice they witness all around them for the benefit of their neighbours or of the country at large. Roman acts out of a feeling of duty towards his country and his fellow-citizens. Reginald's killing of Von Eisen enables the villagers to live in peace. Von Serrat states specifically that he cannot bear the thought of Von Rorbach casting a blight over the lives of innocent peasants and takes the law into his own hands. Edwin's whole purpose in life consists in levelling out social unevenness, in this case demonstrating that the merchants are the equals in courage to the knights and have the right to marry whomsoever they will despite the dictates of society. Consequently, Bestuzhev shows concern with all layers of society, and soldiers in particular have a substantial part to fulfil. He comments on peasants, merchants, dispossessed nobles, robbers, and lowly-born orphans without compunction, showing himself to be writing in the traditions of democratic romanticism.

Extending further than the reconstruction of society came the third ideal of romantic universalism. It was not enough for the hero to fulfil himself and then reorganise his own social background; this perfectibility of man and society had to reach out to embrace the whole universe. This can be observed most clearly in the way

in which all the countries of Europe grasped at the noteworthy ideas of romantic writers, whatever their country of origin. The Romantics transcended the bounds of nation and country in their objective of setting the entire world to rights. Idealism and humanism were the motivating forces that captured the hearts of the Romantics. They did not attack so much England, Germany or France in particular, as life in general. Byron's satire destroyed outworn modes of existence, exposed hypocrisy and routine, grieved about human calamities, showed concern about a better age for mankind, liberated from ~~many~~ ugly and degrading bonds, and fought for the free development of the human ego. Shelley's Prometheus is a figure who symbolises a great abstract idea; what matters in him is not a personal destiny but something universal. He stands for the desire in the ~~Russian~~ human soul to create harmony through reason and love, and for this he displays unequalled courage and inimitable qualities of endurance. He is precisely what Shelley regarded as the noblest force in the human self, the desire for good and the willingness to make any sacrifice to attain it. Blake's compassionate heart was outraged by the sufferings inflicted on the humbler members of society and the wastage of human material, and so he sympathetically describes the chimney sweep, soldier or harlot. But what he was portraying

were the tragic restrictions which imprison and kill the living spirit and he passionately denounced oppression and slavery on the universal level. Wordsworth and Rousseau expressed the belief that life in towns deadens the finer instincts of men and that they find their true selves only in the presence of natural things; this panacea for human ills was acceptable to all peoples and all times. Goethe's Faust looks upon himself as a representative of mankind; the trials and tribulations of men echo in his heart painfully and he therefore feels the consciousness of his own inability to rectify matters so terribly. Between him and other men there exists a brotherhood of suffering. He wishes to experience everything that constitutes the lot of humanity, he wants to embrace the base and the lofty, he longs to take to his bosom both happiness and sorrow, he craves to broaden his own limited ego so that it stretches to all men, and finally, to perish together with them.

The main points which served as soil for the growth of the romantic world-view, in summary, were the individuality, the nation, and universality. The task of the Romantics was to liberate the noble human spirit from the fetters of falsely guided civilisation, to summon it to the service of the ideal of truth, good and beauty, to grant the opportunity to each nation of developing its full spiritual powers,

and finally to gather into one whole all the accumulated intellectual and moral riches of these separate peoples - thereby creating the universal happiness of the human race.

It was here Bestuzhev met with the failure that was to ensure that his reputation was both short-lived and peculiar to Russia. There is no universal appeal in his work; nothing with which an Englishman or a Frenchman might identify. There is nothing which guarantees the lasting fame of a writer more than universality, and it is on this very point that Bestuzhev falls down so badly. His individuality and nationality were two aspects that contributed to his renown in Russia in the 1820's and 1830's. The fact that they too did not stand the test of time is attributable to his poor quality as a craftsman. The fact that his renown never overstepped the shores of Russia is directly owing to the total absence of universal ideas in his work. The appeal of his stories is severely restricted to the literary historian. Narrow in outlook, limited in scope, and difficult to understand for the outsider, his stories were doomed to oblivion.

Bestuzhev's connection with European literature is evident from the angle of plot-construction. Bestuzhev's plots are basically sentimental love stories - (cf. Roman and Olga, Edwin and Minna, Ronald and Mary; Vladimir Sitsky and his brother Mikhail are locked

in rivalry over Yelena: in A Novel in Seven Letters, the hero loses his beloved to Erast [the connection with Karamzin's Erast in Poor Liza is all too obvious.]) - with no originality in plot structure or development. But Bestuzhev exceeds even the sentimentalists in his surprising dénouements; after Ronald's love for Mary has met with tragic failure, he enters a church years later and finds her dead in a coffin! Roman's love for Olga eventually succeeds after grim setbacks, because the Novgorodian he saves happens to be Olga's own father! Mechin is betrayed by Sofia and, when in the Caucasus, he comes across her - ruined by a marriage of convenience, the sacrifice of society, pining away in mortal distress! Bestuzhev was not free from the tendencies he himself in later years strongly condemned regarding foreign sentimentalists:

At that time Kotzebue and Genlis were already beginning to bring into fashion false sentimentality, laments over trifles, tears of compassion for the weaknesses of love for they did not understand the fire and poison of passions. *

b) Bestuzhev and the Gothic Novel.

The Gothic trend in literature was a peculiar phenomenon probably arising out of an aversion to the common sense and conventional reason of the classical era. Instead of readily accepted standards and easily sanctioned experiences, this new movement moved towards the non-rational - that which is sometimes unjustifiable and unaccountable. The supernatural and the fantastic, the picturesque and the formidable, the remote and the unfamiliar, spiced with danger, disaster and adventure, was injected into the lifeblood of literature. There was hardly a writer who was unaffected by this world of phantasy and the inexplicable, and some devoted the whole of their artistic powers to it.

Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, M.G. Lewis's The Monk, Ann Radcliffe's The Italian and The Mysteries of Udolpho, William Beckford's History of the Caliph Vathek, and C.R. Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer were remarkably popular in the romantic age and were variations on the same theme. Taken together, they now look puerile and shallow in their search for cheap thrills and suspense. Dramatic, haunting scenes, insoluble mysteries, sheer horrors, countless surprises churned up for the benefit of the reader, kept the public on tenterhooks. It was just what they relished after the arid boredom of classical tendentiousness. The Gothic left traces

on the poetry of Shelley, whose imagery and diction contain a profusion of such words as ghosts, shades, charnel, tomb, torture and agony, and gruesome passages from The Revolt of Islam, The Sensitive Plant, Prometheus Unbound and The Cenci indicate his obsession with dread, passion, terror and anguish. Burns describes fears and terrors in his poems Halloween and Tam O'Shanter, while Keats' Eve of St. Agnes, Lamia, Isabella and La Belle Dame Sans Merci show an incredible taste for the mysterious and terrible. Many of the villains of the conservative Scott can be aligned with Radcliffe's awe-inspiring Schedoni; their scowling faces, burning eyes and passionate glances have their lineage in the Gothic character.

Several of Bestuzhev's early tales are clearly linked with the Gothic novel of horror and mystery; the influence of the latter can be plainly seen in elements of the fantastic, the accumulation of horrors, the melodramatisation of subject, situations, dialogues and characters, and the setting of Mediaeval castles. Bestuzhev has recourse to all the traditional motifs of the Gothic novel, creating an atmosphere that is redolent of the typical horror novel of Radcliffe, Walpole and Lewis.

The stories concerned are set on a Mediaeval background, with castles looming dark and menacing over the action. The town near

Wenden Castle is appropriately "famed for battles and sieges, strewn with the bones of the valiant, stained with the blood of its founder", * whilst within the castle itself the atmosphere is one of brooding evil and the chilling alternation of noise and quiet: "lights flickered in the corridors, voices whispered and echoed; but soon even the rustle of footsteps ceased, and deathly sleep reigned everywhere". ** The tone of Neuhausen Castle is established immediately by the description of shadows lurking around the castle, which is then lengthily portrayed in all its eerie, awesome, foreboding features. Eisen Castle likewise commences with the castle itself - a huge, formidable edifice designed to strike fear and trembling in all who behold it.

The general atmosphere of the tales is similarly Gothic, recreating firstly scenery to suit the action. In Wenden Castle we read:

The glow died away and a cold mist already met the gloom of the East,

and

The gold-horned moon scarcely shines through the cloud; the slumbering forest does not stir, and the black shadow of the towers lies motionless on the surface of the water. ***

Coldness, darkness, dread silence, and ominous shadows, are the hallmark of these scenes, the scenic devices employed by Bestuzhev so as to inculcate upon his readers the feeling of terror which they sought in literature at that epoch. A more violent type of ambiance is to be seen in Eisen Castle, where "the wind was howling like a wolf in a pine-forest, the sea was stormy, hurling itself against the cliffs and rebounding". * Here the image of a wolf in a forest is intended to fill the reader's imagination with horror, and the stormy sea and crags promising shipwreck and danger have the same effect. Neuhausen Castle supplies us with the most Gothic of all Bestuzhev's scenes, - the court formed by the barons. In the space of several lines, we get a greenish glow on the barons' threatening faces, the flicker of the torches, shadows flitting like ghosts, a black sky, sepulchral firs, and intermittent noises of wind and waves disturbing the motionless quiet. ** Matching the latter scene in the arousing of horror is the final paragraph of A Novel in Seven Letters:

Now it is night - all around slumbers, but the worm in my heart does not sleep. Day passes in pangs of remorse; night fills the darkness with terrors and each noise, each call of the sentry

makes me shudder. If I doze in my weariness - spectres wander around my bed and whisper something in my ear. If I drop off to sleep - terrible dreams disturb my heart: the fateful shot rings out, a deathly groan rends the air; now again whispering silence, now suddenly funeral songs, above me the sound of a spade, I feel stifled, I breathe in the dust of the grave a coffin plank crushes my breast,a worm crawls on my face ..Ah I jump up, and beads of cold sweat seem like drops of blood. *

From Von Serrat's life in wordless wilds, brutal murders,

Situations in the Gothic novel were always surrounded by violence and mystery, revolving round duels, murder, revenge, and villainy. Bestuzhev's tales were no exception; Von Serrat revenges himself on Von Rorbach, Vseslav on Von Mey, Reginald on Von Eisen, and Schreiterfeld on Gideon, in Gideon. Melodramatic occurrences are visible at every stage; Von Serrat rides through the night to accomplish his mission of vengeance, and around the lonely rider an atmosphere of terror is built up:

with a groan, his huge sword shining, rushed to the lantern, twirling

But whose shadow flickers in the fallow? Is it not a ghost??
Or an avenging priest sent forth at midnight to call up hellish spirits by sorcery? **

Her hands came to herself, a shiver ran through her veins

loud, hellish laughter rang out above her. "Death for death,

she murmured, and her blood ran cold. Another

groan, another effort, another dull wall, and that was all. **

Von Mey's death is horrific enough to satisfy the taste of the most bloodthirsty reader:

Romuald, emaciated, pierced through by a sharp log, was hanging with his head down and flowing with blood; his hands were dying with a convulsive jerk, and his lips were uttering indistinct curses. *

Bruno Von Eisen spends his life in merciless raids, brutal murders, maltreating his guests, ravishing the bride of his nephew. The occasion on which he pays a visit to the witch furnishes us with a description of her fearsome appearance, her croaking voice, her vicious temper and the way in which she heats blood. When her black cat attacks him, he sees sparks fly from its fur. The scene in church, in Eisen Castle, is tense and brimful of evil premonition, which is fulfilled when "a warrior in burnished armour, on a black horse, in a white cloak with a cross, his huge sword shining, rushed to the lectern, trampling the terror-stricken guests". ** The burial of the heroine alive is gruesome to the extreme:

Poor Louisa came to herself, a shiver ran through her veins Loud, hellish laughter rang out above her. "Death for death, faithless one!" said someone, and her blood ran cold. Another groan, another effort, another dull wail, and that was all. ***

In Gideon, during the wedding of Gideon's daughter, Yevpraksiya, a knight, Schreiterfeld, whose father Gideon had killed and whose infant brothers and sisters Gideon's party had smashed on stone, bursts into the banqueting hall, slays the guests, burns the mansion, and carries off Gideon for execution along with his daughter and her husband. Gideon and his son-in-law manage to escape, but Yevpraksiya is shot by Schreiterfeld. When her husband comes to the rescue, he and Schreiterfeld fly into the abyss, and leave Gideon sorrowing over his daughter's body.

Characters too ascend to the emotional and psychological level of Gothic heroes, that is, to a high watermark of truculence and vigour, and on the opposite plane to exaggerated sentimentality and maudlin behaviour. They cannot contain their preternatural passions, which express themselves in all kinds of verbal outpourings or physical manifestations of strength, ferocity, or sensibility. Von Serrat loses control of himself and vents his wrath -

Beside himself, turned to stone, gnashing his teeth in anger, feelings of frenzy poured out in oaths and threats. *

Von Nordeck's fury is unrestrained and takes control of the whole of his being -

By the uneven jingle of his spurs, by the agitation in his breast, it was evident that he was beside himself; his face burned with rage, and his bloodshot eyes darted here and there. *

Burtneck's loss of temper has frightful consequences:

his anger, set alight by each word, at last exploded like a Roman candle, and oaths flew like crackers in all directions. **

Bruno Von Eisen is a person of titanic proportions, whose "glance was so fierce and piercing that it killed swallows in flight", *** who cannot tolerate resistance or opposition and deals hastily and implacably with all who presume to cross his path, accidentally or intentionally, from peasants to guests, from wife to nephew, from friend to foe.

Any love these characters might feel is likewise heightened in intensity, Vseslav looking upon it as something stormy, full of agitation, causeless wild cheerfulness and despair, with fire consuming one's heart and jealousy burning it. **** Von Mey is unable to moderate the force of his ardour and cries out desperately:

"Love sets me aflame, but jealousy gnaws my soul still more". *

We are told of him:

In his soul mingled all the sultry passions of the East and an unbridled will, which desired everything. **

Heroines in the Gothic novel were sweet, innocent, gentle, pure creatures who swooned at any mishap and were open to the candid love offered by their ideal suitors. Emma behaves as if she were the prototype of such heroines; when she awaits news of the duel, "Emma's heart beat fast and hard, her head whirled, her breath died away in her breast"; *** when she supposes Ewald to be dead, "her eyes grew dim, her voice faded, and her head rolled onto her breast". **** The idealisation of Minna is in a like vein; she shares Emma's faithfulness and devotion, is not in the ordinary run of girls, for her imagination harbours dreams of happiness and her heart sighs for a vague but delightful ideal. ***** When she and Edwin realise their mutual adoration, "their souls interfused in one expressive, but inexpressible glance". *****

At times Bestuzhev's characters relapse into dialogue that is strongly reminiscent of Gothic bombast. The quarrel that explodes between Von Rorbach and Von Serrat is the typification of such exaggerated dialogue:

"Contemptible beast! thank fate that I have not my sword with me..."

"Cowardly braggart! boast of your bravery to the Estonians, driven away by the mere sound of spurs....." *

Reginald and Bruno vie with the latter characters in producing expletives, insults and threats;

"I would have shot you, outrageous braggart, cursed murderer, had I foreseen the outcome, but you will not escape punishment!"

"Silence, child....or I'll order this iron glove to be stuffed into your mouth....Away, or I'll whip you with straps like the last stable-man." **

Von Nordeck's vows of retribution resound rhetorically:

"If you do not confess, I swear by God...the wolves will celebrate my wrath on your corpse", ***

while Von Mey's are no less eloquent:

"I guarantee that in two days she will play with this dagger which slaked its thirst on the blood of her husband". ****

Bestuzhev, on frequent occasions, expressly emphasises the countless horrors with which he paints his scenes, thereby driving home the point

that he is deliberately and consciously following Gothic traditions. For instance, we read in Gideon : "The slaughter was terrible!¹² ; *
in Neuhausen Castle : " "Monster!" said Ewald, shuddering in horror". ** and
"The picture was awful". ***
and in Eisen Castle : "Horrible!¹⁴ And now, when I think of such an end,
a cold sweat breaks out on me and my nails turn
deathly pale,". ****

It is possible to multiply such examples of Bestuzhev's Gothic tendencies until they form a formidable list. The present quotations suffice to give some idea of Bestuzhev's use of Gothic devices in the narration of his tales. The question as to whether he succeeded or not depends on the taste of the reader; the average reader of the 1820's in Russia revelled in this feature of Bestuzhev's tales , whereas a present-day reader would find little to commend it.

c) Bestuzhev and Scott.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century appeared historical tales with a remarkable preponderance of the historical element and the desire to cull material directly from chronicles or other sources: Gerakov's Prince Menshchikov, 1801, the anonymous Kseniya, Princess of Galicia, 1808, the historical tales of S. Glinka, 1810, and historical novels from the life of the Ukraine by F.N. Glinka, Grest Somov and Narezhny. But it is apparent from Bestuzhev's letters and critical reviews that he paid them only desultory attention, derived little inspiration from them, and reserved his praise for Scott. Bestuzhev's tales in their own right stood out conspicuously above these other tenuous efforts and laid the foundations for the Russian historical novel. In his preface to An Oath at the Lord's Grave, N. Polevoy claimed:

The first attempts at real historical tales appeared as long ago as 1822 in the "Polar Star". I mean the tales of A. Bestuzhev : Roman and Olga, The Reval Tournament, Neuhausen Castle. These were the first attempts at the real historical Russian novel. ¹

1. N. Polevoy, Klyatva pri grobe gospodnem, M, 1832, Part 1, Chap. XI - XII.

It was Scott whom Bestuzhev relied upon for literary method. The first method employed by Scott was the description of the outer surroundings and trappings of life, the decorative depiction of all details of the historic past. He provided a rich selection of pictures, skilfully putting the reader in the position of the spectator. Scott's descriptions of external objects and natural scenery were extremely successful. Everything is astir with life and movement; characters, costumes, horses, banners, hunts, battles, are drawn in vivid colours on the background of wild nature with its mists, pine-trees, waterfalls, cliffs and lakes. Scott thereby poetised antiquity, by adopting the technique of local colour; clothes, arms, castles, gaols, constitute Scott's attempt to paint realistic antiquity.

In the region of the poetisation of national life, Bestuzhev failed to realise what Scott had taught him. He was not endowed with Scott's gift of examining every old object in its habitat and every monument of native history from its poetic side. His application of local colour was hardly successful to any degree. He refers frequently to types of ancient armour, clothing, horses, knights, skirmishes, and hunting sorties, but almost never makes them perceived or felt. He goes to great pains to ratify the historical or ethnographical veracity of his affirmations in footnotes. For example, when mentioning Wenden Castle, he relates

that Rorbach also built the castles of Segevold and Ateraden; the Popes who accused the knights of butchery he names specifically as Innocent III, Gregory IX, and Alexander III; * He explains that Crimean horses were ridden by the knights because they had bought them from the Lithuanians, who in turn had obtained them from Crimean tribes; ** he even notes the source of Von Serrat's death on the wheel in 1208 as being the first volume of Arndt's History; *** he verifies the existence of Neuhausen Castle by standing on its present site and describing its present condition. Nonetheless, despite his insistence on the authenticity of historical personages, geographical locations, and suchlike, Bestuzhev made numerous errors in his dates and facts. ****

This carelessness and lack of attention to detail signalises Bestuzhev's own peculiar method, namely the absolute subjectivisation of his material. For him history is not genuine archaeological data, but is inspired by his own heart and imagination. Not for him delving into manuscripts and chronicles, worrying over the minutiae of a problem, emphasising exactitude and documentary investigation; he gives full rein to his imagination, allows himself to recreate the past on the basis of his own subjective attitudes, and uses various historical allusions and appellations merely as superimpositions on the narrative, as addenda to the story. But he fails to create the

feeling, the atmosphere, of realistic and domestic history, extracting just the adornments which please him and contribute to the false colour of his story, such as attire, habitations, and mode of existence. But within the very sphere of this subjective attitude to history vast strides had been made. Formerly history had been written from the viewpoint of the tsars and the aristocracy, de haut en bas, without proper regard to the position or contribution of the people; and in a factual, cold manner. But Scott treated all scales of society, from royalty to the commonfolk, from lords to the bourgeoisie, and he did this on the basis of his own imaginative powers. Thus the conflict between critics who accused Scott of distorting historical truth (Taine, Brandes) and those who defended his original approach and his attention to general historical reality (Maigron, Wenger, Lockhart, Hutton, Carlyle, Ruskin.)

Eisen Castle purports to be a historical tale, but there is little evidence to suggest that this is the case. There is only a flimsy pretence to the historical at the very end of the tale, when Bestuzhev declares in a short note; "The customs and occurrences of this tale are derived from the Livonian chronicles". * The epigraph, too, in which Bestuzhev professes to have heard the story on a campaign from a captain who loved historical tales and old fables and had

learned about the castle from a pastor, serves as a reminder that Bestuzhev was scarcely interested in historical sources and sound facts.

The Reval Tournament presents a new stage in Bestuzhev's treatment of history as he essays to introduce realist principles into his work. He discusses this development in an epigraph to the story:

You are accustomed to seeing knights through the stained-glass windows of their castles, through the mist of antiquity and poetry. Now I shall open the door into their dwelling, I shall show them close up and truthfully. *

The story treats the tournament of 1538 as told in Russov's chronicle,¹ and historical depth is achieved to some extent by the usage of occasional footnotes but more often by historical explanations within the story itself. For instance, the insertion into conversations and narration of references to battles at Pskov and Narva, which took place in 1501 - 02, ** to Sigismund I, King of Poland from 1508 - 48, *** manifold etimographical details, and a sixth chapter devoted to an account of Livonia in the sixteenth century, contributes largely to an ambiance of verisimilitude.

1. Bazanov, Ocherki dekabristskoy literatury, pp 316 - 317.

Though the most successful of Bestuzhev's historical tales, The Reval Tournament affords no grounds for believing Bestuzhev to have reached the standard of Scott in the reproduction of national life. Only when he captures all the revelry and brightness of Reval on the day of the tournament, does his work resemble Scott's in any way:

All the windows were opened, laid with cushions, hung with carpets. Ribbons and many-coloured cloths fluttered everywhere; the gaiety of the houses, apparels, and decorations, afforded a strange but pleasing spectacle. Finally, an hour before noon, trumpets sounded throughout the town, and in an instant the windows swarmed with spectators, and the amphitheatre was filled with the best merchants and the old knights. *

Bestuzhev conjures up the finery, splendour and excitement of the tournament and its jousts, and for the first time in Bestuzhev's work historical pageantry comes to life in a blaze of thrills and colour.

If Scott's first method can be called the poetisation of national life, the second is the poetisation of national spirit. The descriptions of Scott acquired the same significance for the psychology of nations, as the descriptions of Byron did for the psychology of separate personalities.

If Byron was the poet of individual personality, Scott was the poet of individual nationality. He portrayed human characters with all their national peculiarities; they are alive and realistic, concrete and independent, fresh and truthful, and issue from all classes, positions and ranks in life. They are close to reality and invested with the spiritual life of their nation. Scott gave Scotland a place in world literature, for his landscapes, monuments, mansions, huts, characters, are part and parcel of Scotland. However, these objects and peoples were far from being photographic prints; they were artistic representations.

It is when judging Bestuzhev by the criterion of national spirit that we comprehend the extent of his failure in historical narration. Pushkin wrote to Bestuzhev,

Abandon these Germans and turn to us orthodox Russians
a conversational style;
The novel requires ~~chatter~~; express everything openly. Your
Vladimir speaks the language of German drama, looks at the sun
at midnight, etc. ¹

Indeed Bestuzhev's characters use the language of Schiller and the romantic poem; they do not belong to Russia nor do they possess any inherent traits

1. A.S. Pushkin, Sobraniye sochineniy v desyati tomakh, M, 1962, vol. 9, p 160.

of the Russian character. Vladimir Sitsky asks:

"What slander is blacker than this truth? Yes, I am gnawed by my powerless wrath. Why does my indignation not blow like a storm? Why are my curses unable to fly and burn like lightning, why am I unable to tear down the vault of heaven with this hand and bring it down upon the heads of my enemies?" *

These characters talk and behave like the romantic characters of Germany, England or France and provide nothing to remind one that they were born on Russian soil, were nurtured in Russian conditions, and had imbibed the culture, laws, customs and faith of Russia. The Russian tales, the contents of which Bestuzhev took from Russian antiquity, on the surface have Russian speech, Russian names, Russian beliefs and habits, and ~~references~~ to Russian history. But there is no Russian spirit, inspiration or soul. The German knights and ladies in the Livonian tales do not differ at all from these Russians; they utter the same speeches and conduct themselves in the same manner. To all intents and purposes, all the heroes of Bestuzhev lived at the same time, were brought up in similar circumstances, and were an amalgam of the same opinions, ideals, and aspirations.

Bestuzhev wrote in a footnote to Roman and Olga:

The duration of my tale is from mid - 1396 to mid - 1398

All the historical events and characters mentioned in it are represented with unremitting exactitude, and the customs, prejudices and habits I have depicted, on calculation, from extant legends and memoirs. In language I have tried to draw near to the simple real Russian tale and I can guarantee that the words which will seem strange to many are not invented but are taken by me from ancient chronicles, songs and stories. *

This stress on the authenticity of incidents, characters, mode of existence and language, does not detract from the fact that Bestuzhev adapts these trimmings to his own subjective purposes. The story, decked out as it is with the furnishings of local colour, nevertheless comes over to us as a sentimental tale which is bereft of Russian feeling and character.

The towns of Reval, Novgorod and Pereyaslav, the castles of Wenden, Eisen and Neuhausen, the scenery around all these historic places, also fall short of Scott's magical impregnation of static objects with national spirit. Scott bestowed upon every old stone or tree the poetry of

historical remembrance, whereas Bestuzhev somehow was unable to recapture the glory and drama that was Russia or to instil into his towns, castles or scenery a Russian heart; instead he produced Gothic castles, commonplace towns, ordinary scenery, and everyday objects, untouched by the poetry of historical re-creation.

For example, Bestuzhev's visit to Lake Chudskoye occasions an excerpt in Page from the Diary of a Guards Officer, of 1821, which is pleasant and must have delighted the contemporary reader, but on the other hand is not marked by any Russian peculiarity or distinctiveness. The pensive youth sits at the edge of the lake, on the broken stump of a pine-tree, with the wind blowing the raindrops from his hair, and looks about him:

Tattered clouds now take to flight across the sky, now are heaped on the edge of the horizon, and in the distance break up into rain. Peipus rages: the waves in long rows roll onto the shore, and there is not a soul to be seen on the shore, nor a boat on the lake; all around is empty and wild, as if even the thought of man has not flown hither. But look, how consolingly a momentary rainbow has shone between the clouds hanging over the gloomy abyss. *

Appropriating to himself Scott's subjective attitude to history, Scott's descriptions of national life, and Scott's national spirit, Bestuzhev, first of all did not penetrate deeply enough into these techniques and, secondly, whilst taking words and ideas from Russian chronicles, songs and legends, ¹ he possessed only a superficial knowledge of Russian antiquity. This led ultimately to his lack of success in the field of the historical novel.

1. In Roman and Olga two verse epigraphs are noted, having been adapted from national songs; the third is from Merzlyakov.

d) Bestuzhev and Byron.

As has already been pointed out, Bestuzhev knew Byron's poetry best. Many comparisons can be made between passages from Bestuzhev and the poetry of Byron. This is particularly visible when Bestuzhev approaches the realm of Byronic reflections on death and the fragility of earthly life, ruins, vanished nations, changing religions, social hypocrisy, frailty of women, primeval simplicity and customs, and the preference of the man of wild nature over the man of refined culture. Byron's Don Juan found idyllic love and blissful happiness on the remote shores of a desert island in the company of an unspoiled child of nature, the young and sweet Haidée. His Corsair, Giaour, and Childe Harold escape the chains of society and enjoy the freedom of travel in the wide open spaces. Bestuzhev shows his admiration for primeval life when he describes Berkut's existence in the woods as a robber as an enviable one, unhampered by social prejudices and restrictions; Vladimir Sitsky too contrasts the stifling court life with the open-air life of freedom and self-indulgence:

"I tore myself from the stuffy Kremlin palaces, so as to breathe the wind and storm which recalled me, so as to wreak my hatred for people on the wild beasts". *

One of Byron's recurring topics was the cowardice, stupidity and cant that reigned in English society. He bitterly attacked the self-satisfaction and selfishness of the English ruling classes, continually referring to the slothfulness, immorality and domesticity of the society he loathed.

Society is subjected to Bestuzhev's acid criticism; Night on Board Ship is an account of how Mary Aston becomes intoxicated with the glamour of society life and is eventually ruined by it. Society brings about the downfall of Berkut in Roman and Olga; he is destroyed by the dissipated, luxurious life led there. In Evening on a Bivouac the cynical Major Vladov advises Mechin against the folly of choosing a bride from high society, who has been educated to value only luxury, is hence prejudiced by her upbringing, is in love with clothes, coiffure, fine carriages, social calls, and dancing, and whose whole life revolves round society and is lived for the sake of society. In fact, she is true to what society has taught her, being faithless to her lover. *

Byron never followed the romantic treatment of love as an exalted, divine expression of the soul - a prefiguration of heaven. He often referred to women cynically, especially the society women whose falseness and mannerisms he detested. The women with whom Don Juan

comes into contact only exist to furnish him with further experiences, and Byron's stronger heroes use women simply as help-mates. They are secondary characters, whose foibles Byron is quick to spot and ridicule.

Bestuzhev's acerbity extends to the subject of the female sex. Roman, in his dire exasperation, rebukes Olga hotly for her lack of will-power and independence:

"Women, women! he pronounced with savage mockery, "and you boast of your love, constancy, sensibility! You are compassionate only where songs are concerned; you captivate the gullible out of vainglory! Your love is mere whim, garrulous, and fleeting like a swallow; but when you have to prove it by deed and not by word, how profuse are your excuses, how generous your advice, old fables and reproaches!" **

Major Vladov, the bitter philosopher of A Second Evening on a Bivouac, asks indignantly:

"Is it possible to entrust them with one's happiness in life, when their opinions, their desires, their passions, are based on caprice? Fashions, not feelings, are more in their line; they can please, but not love; the lofty feeling of being loved by a man of noble character is lost on them". **

Dr. Lontzius, the perennial cynic and humorist in The Reval Tournament, unleashes his sharp tongue against women in general with the remark:

"I know that there's nothing to say about the modest ones, no reason to speak of the nice ones, and the rest bore me". *

Bestuzhev allows himself several caustic observations regarding womankind during the course of the action in Eisen Castle:

Woman's mind is weak - she sees only what is before her eyes

Woman's heart has a short memory - their tears are dew; they fall just as easily as they dry up. **

The cult of Hellenism was started by Byron, Shelley and Keats who turned their eyes to Greece and Italy for elegance, legend, fresh natural description, and also as lands of freedom.

Novgorod, Pskov and Pereyaslav mean the same to Bestuzhev as Rome and Greece did to Byron. They are towns symbolising past glories, exploits, and achievements, calling forth Bestuzhev's enthusiastic pride and devotion and his rapturous reaction to their democratic, nationalistic structure. In the manner of Byron, he stands near the ruins of castles and monuments, recollecting former triumphs and historical events.

Sometimes in the speeches of Bestuzhev's heroes and in his own judgments the repetition of familiar ideas and even phrases of Western European romantics can be noticed when they adopt a way of thinking and speaking which is reminiscent of romantic individualism. Byronic heroes, such as Cain and Manfred, stand apart from society in their isolated ivory towers and the innate sense of their own superiority endows them with the right to castigate its vices. For instance, the young enthusiast Edwin sketches Reval society as false and hypocritical, from the angle of his own ideals:

"That woman over there who is decked out very like a ship's figurehead is the wife of the magistracy council member Klaus; she, it is said, really turns the helm of our Council and more than once has run our course aground. The exemplary couple beside her are the burgomaster Fegezak with his better half: they are aflame with one passion - glass, that is, he with the tankard, and she with the mirror. That pocket lady, who, talking ceaselessly, is hanging on the neck of her fat husband, like a bell on an ox, is the noblewoman Zegefeltz. He, they say, took a little wife so that she shouldn't be able to lead him by the nose; but now his ears catch it badly. While on the subject of earsThat young man who seems to be hiding their length in his tall hat is

Ezelkrantz, a member of the court of justice; behind him is sitting the singer Fräulein Liliendorff - the experts say that her voice is a mixture of the nightingale and owl; and her ethereal neighbour, whose face and dress are as bright as a rainbow, is Baroness Gertzfisch. She should long ago have fallen from our sky. Further you can see the mistress of Commander Zangheimdon't be surprised that she is sitting above his wife: it's not uncommon among us". *

This manner of speaking heatedly about the vices and imperfections of everyday life is common to the Sturm-und-Drang, the romantic movement in France, and many heroes of Byron. Bestuzhev, though not reproducing the entire content of their fiery protests against degenerate cultured society, faithfully imitated the manner itself of protesting.

It did not suffice that Byronic heroes should be outsiders; they had to prove their value by outshining everyone else. Flouting society and its members, they are galvanised into vicious denunciations, powerful emotions, titanic actions, astounding exhibitions of energy. They become elemental forces of nature, like the sea or the lightning, which have burst their bonds and sweep on grandly and destructively.

Conscious that he was the bearer of the idea of human individuality, Bestuzhev wanted his heroes too by their spiritual nature to be worthy

of this great idea, and at times he despaired of his former characters, considering them to be minor, pitiful, unsatisfactory efforts. His letter of the 16th. December, 1831, illustrates this point excellently:

Words seem so narrow to me, the pen so slow for full flow, for free scope, talent requires space; no, I am not satisfied with my creations! They are children, sometimes amusing, sometimes nice, at times even clever, but nonetheless children, nonetheless dwarfs, and I am living in the land of gigantic mountains, in the world of giants, dreams For God's sake, do not remind me of my tales! *

Bestuzhev, contriving to depict these giants of the spirit, endows them with noble virtues of the soul and extreme emotions, and poses them majestic tasks. The higher nature which Bestuzhev essays to portray is always distinguished by extraordinary passion. This is a quality inherent in all the mighty heroes of romantic poetry; everything appertaining to the character of the higher nature is huge and powerful - both evil and revenge, both magnanimity and self-sacrifice, both sorrow and joy; nothing can be done in half measures. Offended and hopeless love manifests itself in passionate outbursts of unbounded despair:

In a frenzy of dumb despair, fixing his motionless gaze on the door, he sat for a long time on the oak bench, neither seeing nor hearing anything. Bitter sighs engulfed his breast and disturbed his breathing; finally nature took the upper hand; in two streams the tears spurted out of the youth's eyes; sobbing, he fell onto the breast of his generous friend. *

Edwin's reactions to disappointment in love far exceed Roman's:

His glance afire, Edwin stood in the middle of the room; his breast heaved, his right hand looked as if it was squeezing the hilt of a sword, and suddenly, like a lion, he proudly tossed his curls and rushed off Like a madman Edwin ran home. His cloak fell to the ground. A blow from his foot smashed the bedroom doors into smithereens, and he angrily tore the candle from his old servant's hands. **

The same lovers, on the threshold of happiness when their love is requited, see no limits to their generosity and self-sacrifice:

"Minna! he exclaimed at last, seizing the goblet: "so be it! I would have drunk death from the cup which had touched your lips". ***

and Roman's violent anger and reproaches turn to pleas for forgiveness and to blissful love. *

Thus the most contradictory feelings exist side by side in the same character - revenge and forgiveness, hatred and magnanimity, contempt and friendship.

The courage of these heroes is immense; time and again we read "Бесстрашный Роман", "Бесстрашный Андрей", "Бесстрашный Овечкин", and this high standard is upheld as they display their exceptional bravery in action. Ronald risks his life and scorns death for the sake of his beloved, proclaiming -

"I would give up a thousand lives one after the other to save Mary - but I forgot about myself and about death" **

Roman surrenders everything to his love for Olga, assuring her;

"Was it not for you that I forgot fame, and society, and everything around me?" ***

and then sacrifices even his love for Olga to his revered Novgorod, facing death stoically. **** Von Nordeck despises death at the hands of the Teutonic knights and manfully questions their right to judge him. *****

Edwin, quite unpractised in the art of jousting, presumes to challenge the redoubtable, undefeated Ungern to battle. Ovechkin and Shcherbina cannot contemplate surrender even when the odds are impossibly stacked against them and death stares them in the face. This superhuman intrepidity is usually combined with an equally passionate persistence and immutable will; Von Mey cries out,

"My hand would sooner turn a spindle, instead of wielding a spear, than I should renounce my intention. There is no testament nor obstacle to my will - except death". *

Nevertheless, in typically Byronic fashion, neither boundless courage, not iron will, not passionate feelings, nor ecstatic delights, afford pleasure to these singular natures. Describing the knights, Bestuzhev explained:

Boredom sat with them on the saddle and on the chair unbidden, and, like a devil in a jug, looked out from the bottom of the glass.

Their faces carry a habitually sad expression because "only rarely could he squeeze laughter from his heart" ** and because "stern sorrow" involuntarily lends their perpetually "pale" faces "solemnity and an interesting look". ***

The reason for their melancholy is an unsuccessful adventure or some personal misfortune such as an unhappy love affair. Ronald in Night on Board Ship has experienced such ill luck in his relationship with Mary Aston. He attributes his present sorrow to this cause:

"Have I loved? what other passion in our days can exalt
the soul to rapture or drive it to despair!" *

Edwin's grief derives from the fact that his love is menaced and denied simply because he is not of a suitable social background; in his chagrin he complains:

"Ah! why am I not a knight! Why am I ill-starred in my
prosperity!" **

Vladimir Sitsky's, on the other hand, has its roots in the gnawing thought of his treachery:

So spoke Vladimir in profound and unfeigned melancholy. His lips,
still covered in dust, trembled, and on his face, bespattered
with blood, the anguish of his soul stood out. ***

For many of Bestuzhev's heroes the cause of sorrow lies in their whole outlook on the world, not in just a single personal failure. They feel

oppressed and disillusioned to the core of their beings because their unsuccessful ideals are too bold and lofty for the earth. Sitsky meditates on his youthful hopes:

"my soul aspired to something mighty, something dreadful". *

These heroes dream of a great exploit which will bring them fame and fulfilment. As a soldier Lidin wishes to be crowned with military distinction:

"I have dreamed that I was promoted to the rank of staff-officer for distinguished conduct, that I plucked the cross of St. George from the enemy cannon, that I returned to Moscow covered in wounds and glory; that my uncle, who is older than the Dendrian Zodiac, died of joy, and now rich, I flung myself at the feet of my dear, peerless Alexandra! " **

These heroes, therefore, who nourish their ideals of adventure, love, feeling and courage in preference to society's inanity, coldness, prejudice and cowardice, proceed to passionate protest against the imperfection besetting them on all sides, in particular against any coercion exerted by society against them, and against the spiritual enslavement of the personality by conventional and artificial social morality. Bestuzhev's

higher natures speak out forcefully about the corruption of morals in society and the decline of innocence in peasant life; they defend the human individuality against coarse ignorance and brute force which fails to recognise the basic rights and privileges of each person.

Schreiterfeld accuses Gideon of ruining his life:

"Villain, you deprived me of my freedom, honour, and everything that is dear to man on earth". *

Reginald revolts against the ill treatment and training he has received from his uncle:

"You taught me to spill innocent blood at whim, so do not wonder now that I wish to slake my thirst on yours in vengeance. Do you remember that you robbed me of my estate and will, led a relative a wretched life like a servant's, humiliated, offended, despised me, and finally took my bride away and reduced me to such straits that I lost my peace of mind and purity of conscience?You villainously destroyed everything which is dear on earth and flattering in heaven for the soul You abandoned me to death by starvation ... You tortured and tormented this angel, the saviour of my life, whom you did not appreciate and did not deserve". **

Von Serrat attacks another such rapacious baron, not in the name of personal offences, but in defence of the subjugated peasants, arraigning him for setting snares and killing the chamois and hares, for disturbing the peasants in their work and destroying the hard-earned fruits of their labours, and asking him:

"Why are you invested with power, so as to use it in jest?
I see the dignity of the order, but I do not see in you
chivalrous honour".

He pronounces proudly:

"I consider it an honour to be the defender of my vassals and will
allow no one to oppress them for any reason". *

If these heroes protest about personal coercion, they do not refrain from exposing the fact that the authorities themselves are frequently invidious and corruptible, that so-called justice can be a dark, oppressive force, militating against personal freedom and absolute truth; Ewald Von Nordeck, addressing the Arensburg secret court which had seized him without warning, declares:

"Truth has no need to crawl in gloom and mystery; justice accuses in public and punishes before the world, and does not bite like a serpent in the heel, does not strike like a bandit from behind a corner. Once more I ask: what right do you have to judge me?" *

However, even the most powerful and active heroes of Sturm-und-Drang, of French and English romanticism, are unable to proceed further than their impassioned outbursts. Although they are possessed of a desire to reconstruct the world according to their own idealised vision, their criticisms are destructive and never constructive; they are unable to accomplish and perfect anything decisive. Bestuzhev's heroes are inspired with the severest rancour when they behold violence perpetrated against individuality, abuse of authority, neglect of justice, social falsehood, and yet their struggle is confined to protest alone. They cannot suggest anything to replace the cultural and social structure they have dethroned. They can offer no solution nor can they reconstruct any substitute. All they can do is execute revenge on their tyrannical oppressors. Von Serrat tries to act nobly in the true spirit of the sword-bearers: he carries out his words - "Was it really for outer adornment alone that we drew a bloody cross on our breasts? The cross - symbol of mercy and patience?" - by murdering Rorbach in the dead of night. Edwin, who is denied the right

to be happy merely because of his origins, also realises his individualistic claims - "I am mad, mad! In what hope, by what right, did you presume to raise your eyes to the best light in Livonia! Did you think that a fiery, true heart was worth a chivalric coat-of-arms?... Worshippers of prejudices! O, why can't I stand with a spear at her threshold and challenge to battle every audacious person who wants her hand?" * - by defending them against absurd prejudices in a revengeful duel with Ungern at the tournament. Schreiterfeld satisfies the years of torture he has endured - "For five years, cast like a wild beast into a pit, I fed on the hope alone of revenge. Oh! how I cursed you when the Russian troops went to attack my brothers! I gnawed my fetters, and finally broke them, and at last have come to you to pay my debt" ** - in a gruesome scene of butchery. Reginald vents his suffering and abasement on the head of Von Eisen with remorseless severity - "You will perish! " he announces, unappeased by Bruno's promises of repentance. ***

Another path of fulfilment is peaceful enlightenment and liberation of the soul. Ronald says,

"In fiery souls there is one fatherland", ****

meaning the land of an exalted ideal and spiritual renaissance, which is attained by meditation, acquisition of knowledge, and purification of the human spirit.

A third tentative way towards the ideal social structure was the individualisation of love, on which the romantics concentrated their wholehearted attention. Individualism in love appears when two people love each other because of their individual closeness. This intimacy can sometimes reach the utter fusion of two spiritually akin individuals. Bestuzhev's heroes and heroines usually blend their souls in the feeling of love, in spite of external pressures and resistance. For such love, founded on the kinship of souls, there are no obstacles which cannot be surmounted; such ideal love, according to the romantic notion, stands higher than ordinary rules and does not take into consideration social convention and bigotry.

Bestuzhev's reliance on Byron can be seen also to some extent in his method of narration. In a verse epigraph in The Test, Bestuzhev quotes the line "If I have any fault, it is digression", directly from Byron. Digressions in the manner of Byron are not so common in the early work of Bestuzhev, but they still crop up at infrequent intervals. For the most part they pass comment on either some aspect of nature, as in the extract commencing "Have you seen the sunrise from the blue sea?" * or on his characters, as in the following passage:

I beg the reader, just for my sake, to forgive my hero: in the first place, because he had never read a single French dictionary

of compliments, and in the second place, he was standing before a beautiful girl, to whom he was far from indifferent. Ah! who of us has not at times seemed like a schoolboy before society beauties? who has not bestowed awkward praise on them? God knows why: when the heart is aflame, wit vanishes so far away that neither entreaties nor threats can lure it back. And whatever might be said, I do not believe in the loquacious love of novels. *

A prominent feature of the Byronic poem was rapid transitions of action. Bestuzhev borrows this device from Byron to highlight the scenes of his stories. If we take Wenden Castle and Neuhausen Castle as examples, we can witness quite conspicuous transitions; in the first, immediately after the confrontation between the infuriated knights, we suddenly encounter the letter written by Wigbert as a challenge to Rorbach; then we find ourselves in Rorbach's castle; next we are transported to the countryside with its solitary rider. In the second, the reader's eyes are focused now on one lurid scene, now on another. At one moment we are faced with Neuhausen Castle; then we see a forest glade and its strange occupants; next comes the shore of Livonia and Andrey's band of Russians, the castle tower in which Ewald is imprisoned, the sea where the Russians seize the boat in which Emma is held captive, and finally we return

to Ewald's cell for the climactic dénouement. These switches of scene occur abruptly, without any forewarning or intermediate pause, and thereby ensure the melodrama of every situation, heighten the tension, and render all incidents more effective, starkly dramatic, and striking.

In what he ~~deems~~ Byronic technique, Bestuzhev relates acts of nobility and courage, as well as violent expressions of passion. But he out-Byrons Byron in this respect, and the ultimate result is one of fantastic over-exaggeration and rhetorical strainedness. Ronald swims for miles in a titanic show of strength through stormy seas to save Mary; Roman and six robbers succeed in attacking and defeating twenty men without loss; all Bestuzhev's heroes grind their teeth, bite their lips, break out into cold sweats, seethe with pride, jealousy and anger, thirst for vengeance with unquenchable fire; their blood runs so hot that it boils in their veins or turns as cold as ice, their hearts are rent with unbearable grief or rage; one shouts so loud that the glasses in the cupboards ring against each other, another's gaze is so fierce that it kills swallows in flight. These heroes are therefore unnatural and unrecognisable to the reader of today, who can see nothing realistic in their behaviour.

(a) Language.

Chapter VII

Aesthetic considerations.

2) Language and Style.

This utilization of words and style was extremely useful, when a poet wished to conceal his real political intentions; this even in those days of political theme, these words indicate the hidden presence of serious content. A perfect specimen of this sort of allegory is present in Karyshnik's Blaze II.

Now, a terrible day! in a dreadful storm
Let the waves and gales of the tempest go by never to return,
Let hellish dark tide in hellish dark
And let the flames of love still fall into the abyss! ²

Karyshnik warned the Investigating Committee that he was referring to the will of which storm. However the symbolism of bad weather and disorder

1. Karyshnik, op. cit., p. 116.

2. Karyshnik, op. cit., p. 72.

(a) Language.

The style of the Decembrists' civil poetry was constructed on the usage of "signal words", that is, words which evoked in the reader civil emotions, such as тирани. вольность, рабство, свобода, царь, гражданин, отечество, родина, отчизна, зло, закон, народ, трон.

Note for example in Ryleyev's To a Favourite:

Yet tremble, tyrant! For evil and treachery
Posterity will pronounce its sentence on you. ¹

This utilisation of word-signals was extremely useful when a poet wished to conceal his real political intentions; then even in verse devoid of political theme, these words indicate the hidden presence of serious content. A perfect specimen of this sort of allegory is present in Rayevsky's Elegy 11:

Rage, O terrible day!In a dreadful storm
Let the sorrow and groans of the innocent go by never to return,
Let hellish deeds fade in hellish dark
And let the throne of iron evil fall into the abyss! ²

Rayevsky assured the Investigatory Committee that he was referring to the evil of autumn storms. However the symbolism of bad weather and disorder

1. Ryleyev, op. cit., p 44.

2. Rayevsky, op. cit., p 72.

conveyed political associations, and the words "sorrow of the innocent", "throne", "evil", were word-signals. Rayevsky, in his lessons on spelling to the soldiers under his command, used to dictate the words

вольность, отечество, тиран, свобода,

and the like, so as to instil civil consciousness in them.

Such words as деспотизм were specific terms of Decembrist use and thus political terminology acquired aesthetic connotations. The possibilities of artistic expressiveness in agitational poetry attained incredible heights and colossal force in the work of Pushkin:

Sovereigns! The crown and throne
Are given you by Law - but not by Nature;
You stand higher than the people,
But eternal law is higher than you. ¹

These verses have programme-founded political meaning, that is, the constitutional demands of early Decembrism. However, the underlined words arouse in the reader not only political, but also aesthetic emotions and introduce him to the world of solemn poetry.

In the system of Decembrist civil poetry a word was distinguished by a familiar abstractness, by its symbolistic associations. By its very nature Decembrist poetry was a conventional poetic language, and even words of new political use obeyed this stylistic tone. The ideas of truth, justice,

1, A.S. Pushkin, Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy v desyati tomakh, vol. 1.
M - 1962, p 322.

good, beauty, morality and so on, created a word-usage that was not concrete but pre-eminently abstract. Universal notions were expressed and, words gained a generalised impact; the word "tyrant" could apply to any tyrannical ruler, not to one in particular.

A careful scrutiny of Bestuzhev's early work brings to light the fact that he employed word-signals, which any attentive reader could pick out and apply as fitted the situation. Von Nordeck in Neuhausen Castle asks:

"Is there not another life, where all is truth and good?" *

Roman in Roman and Olga

"has served Novgorod in faith and truth", **

and Yurij rebukes his brother,

"Do not discredit a good citizen". ***

Berkut's speech is filled with Decembrist intonations:

"Hasten whither your duty as a citizen calls you, and know that even in a robber can be hidden a Novgorodian soul. The Novgorodians have deprived me of happiness in life and salvation in heaven, but I love them, I love my country". ****

These words pervade Bestuzhev's prose and occupy a prominent place in the agitational and ritual songs, which however, are so frankly revolutionary that the word-signals lose their abstract quality and become concrete forces.

This side of Decembrist literature is Aesopian in quality, in that it bears a strong resemblance to the fables of Aesop with its avoidance of directness but whole underlying aura of social criticism. In a disguise very easily penetrated, Aesop's fables take the side of the weak and declare for justice against the arbitrary rule of the great. Later every conceivable purpose was served by the fable. But in its origins it provides the inculcation of moral lessons and is a way of pointing out what is true and right in a given situation without causing offence by expressing open condemnation.

In their preoccupation with the past and the poet-cum-prophet, the Decembrists resorted to biblical imagery. The usefulness of biblical metaphor was twofold, in that the bible was at that period almost the only book known to and accessible to the people and the Decembrists wanted their proclamations especially to be comprehensible to the simple people and the ordinary soldier. And so they shunned the refined language of the salons, esoteric hints, high-flown oratory, scholastic abstractions, and hyperbole. They turned to

the bible to assist them in their stylistic ends. They attempted to put the stamp of solemnity and positiveness proper to religious writings on their own oratorical proclamations. Nikita Murav'ev made use of the arguments of the holy writ in his catechism entitled A Curious Conversation, in which he propounded the natural right of man to freedom. Sergey Murav'ev-Apostol, preparing for the rebellion, wrote his Orthodox Catechism - intended for the soldiers of the Chernigovsky regiment. In it he persuaded the soldiers that God had created man free and happy but that the tsars had broken these human rights bestowed by God himself. He advised them to take up arms and to re-establish a government in accordance with God's law.¹ At the same time Mikhail Bestuzhev-Ryumin wrote his own proclamation to the soldiers which commenced with a reference to God. Kitchelbecker's The Prophecy preserved the emotional and inspirational power of biblical writing:

Arise, poet, prophet of freedom,

Perceive and weigh what I have foretold!²

The agitational and ritual songs of Bestuzhev and Ryleyev were generous in their references to God and biblical notations. They were sprinkled with

1. Vosstaniye dekabristov, vol. 4, p 254.

2. Kitchelbecker, op. cit., p 123.

such bible-like sayings as "Кому вынестся, тому сбудется.
Кому сбудется, не минуется."

meaning no one can escape his fate. The refrain "слава Богу" rings out sonorously and continually, like a refrain of inescapable doom. The blacksmith, on the point of plunging his knife in the tsar, utters a prayer. * Religious imagery was a mode of potent expressiveness and was therefore appointed an eminent position in Decembrist stylistic improvisations.

Besides imagery, the Decembrists discerned the value of words themselves in assuming a vital role in the growth of Russian as an independent, purely Slavonic language. Linguistics was just as essential as thematics in the Decembrist literary structure. Bestuzhev was the main combatant in the struggle for the establishment of Russian as a language which could rank alongside English, French and German in the literary realm. Even his first reviews were militant in character and ordained him as a spokesman on Decembrist romantic stylistics. In 1819, in the review "An Essay On the Source of Evil", he strongly favoured the Russian language as a means of communication:

It is regrettable that some either through lack of knowledge of their native tongue or from the vainglory of being famous in other lands write in French. In the first

case it is unforgivable. And in the second case it is too humiliating for a Russian; Derzhavin had no need to write in Chinese, but the ode God is translated into Chinese. *

He invariably contended the cause of the Russian language, deploring reliance on foreign tongues and the one-sidedness of Russian literature which proceeded "from the usage of only French and translations from this language". ** He blames the incursions of foreign languages into Russia for the retardment of Russian:

From the times of Peter the Great, passion for Germanisms and Latinisms with their scholarly terminology insinuated itself upon us. The age of Gallicisms began in the reign of Elizabeth, and only now does our language start to shake off the dust of antiquity and the rattles of foreign dialects. ***

Writers still insist on the superiority of foreign languages, in spite of the wealth of Russian:

Possessing unmined treasures of language, we, like the primitive Americans, exchange this gold for glittering foreign trinkets. ****

This reflection becomes a preoccupation with Bestuzhev, who repeatedly returns to it:

To crown all misfortune, we have grown up on French literature alone, which is quite incompatible with the temperament of the Russian people and the spirit of the Russian language. *

Of what then should the perfect Russian language consist?

Bestuzhev, analysing Katenin's translation of Racine's Esther, noted the "very few successfully translated" verses, and qualified the remainder as "an almost uninterrupted series of unforgivable mistakes against taste, sense, and most of all language, not to mention the demands of poetry and harmony". ** Bestuzhev revolted against the vocabulary of the translation, against "the most out-of-use, rusty Slavonicisms mingled very carelessly with the simplest Russian words". *** Bestuzhev criticised Katenin for the excessive use of archaisms and the misuse of Old Church Slavonic dialect from the standpoint of the Karamzinian purifiers of the language, who fought against Old Church Slavonicisms.

Bestuzhev, at the outset of his career, followed the Arzamas circle of poets - formed in opposition to the Assembly of the Lovers of the Russian Word. A.A. Shakhovskoy represented this latter society, and his comedy,

Lipetsk Spa, or a Lesson to Coquettes met with Bestuzhev's scolding disapprobation. * He defended Zhukovsky from the parodies of Katenin and Shakhovskoy and upheld the Karamzinian viewpoint on linguistic style. He could not find in Shakhovskoy's comedy anything of worth, either "striking characters", "unity in the portrayal of the main characters", or "the attainment of a moral goal".

In 1821, when he was a member of the Free Society of the Lovers of Russian Literature and the bibliographer of Sorevnovatel', Bestuzhev printed in the latter-named journal an article on public reading in the Russian Academy. Speaking with delight of Gnedich's speech and his translation of the Iliad ("Gnedich indubitably deserves the acknowledgement of his contemporaries and the tribute of praise from posterity for his faithful translation in verse of the beauties of Homer") and acclaiming Karamzin's ninth volume of the History of the Russian State ("With what great interest everyone listened to the exploits of their ancestors!"), he referred with a good deal of restraint to Shishkov, who had delivered a speech "On the antiquity and supremacy of the Russian language in onomatopaeic and logical respects". In opposition to Shishkov, Bestuzhev refused to see in Old Church Slavonic the main source of the Russian language, affirming that language was always "the true interpreter of the people's ideas and customs" and that the task of writers was to contribute to the development of the language. He therefore reminded his readers that the Russian language "thundered in the

songs of the bards", "soared with Lomonosov", "astonished in Derzhavin", and "flowered under the pen of Karamzin". *

Shishkov retorted with his Letter to the Publishers, where he emphasised the fact that the more society became cultured the more strongly was felt the damage dealt to a "rich, powerful, magnificent language" - the language of forefathers who knew only Old Church Slavonic dialect. Shishkov made a distinction between the "Russian language" and "the language of writers", considering them to be "two utterly different things". ¹

Bestuzhev continued his battle against Old Church Slavonic and its champion, Shishkov, with a new article, ** wherein he laid stress on the fact that it was impossible to resolve the problem of literary language in isolation from the language of the day:

I think that writers are the creators of the language,
and language bestows immortality on the era and the people
And thus this fruit of the era and peoples can sometimes be
produced in a single decade by one man.

Although denying Old Church Slavonic as a basis for literature, Bestuzhev did not accept the Karamzinian type of language based on facile and refined phraseology. He expressed the need for a philosophical language, a learned

1. Sorevnovatel', 1821, No 14, pp 92 & 98.

vocabulary and a lofty style, quoting as examples Lomonosov, Derzhavin, Leibnitz, Buffon, and Cicero. He was awaiting the arrival of a reformer of the language, such as Lomonosov had been in the 18th. century, capable of perfecting the language of the people; Karamzin, despite his services, was not of the calibre to qualify him for such a monumental task.

N.I. Grech too came under fire after the publication of his Attempt at a Short History of Russian Literature, where he maintained that the language of the Church was for a long time exclusively the language of books. Bestuzhev hotly denied the truth of this and referred to Russkaya Pravda and The Lay of Igor's Host. He remarked:

Russkaya Pravda was published in Yaroslav around 1019, but it is not written in Old Church Slavonic style. The Lay of Igor's Host belongs to the 12th. century but is far removed from the language of the Church In The Lay of Igor's Host the language and style are completely different from the language of the Church and, rather, resemble the language and style of a Novgorodian chronicle from a distance, and on closer inspection, of Russkaya Pravda, judging from their special word-structure and expression. * The Russian language was divorced from Church language long before Grech imagined.

Katenin put forward the same view as Grech in his article on Grech's book, asking:

"In what ancient book will you find precisely the Russian language?"

and answered:

"The Lay of Igor's Host" is written in Byelorussian dialect, the manuscripts almost all in barbaric style".

Only Lomonosov purified the Russian language and made it such as it is now, he stated, continuing:

"How did he achieve his aim? By drawing near to the Old Slavonic language and the language of the Church". ¹

In his "Observations on the Criticism",* Bestuzhev refuted Katenin's thesis.

Katenin in vain doubts the existence of a particular Russian language. When and how it was compiled, no one can determine, but that it was, and much earlier than the 12th. century at that, is proved by Russkaya Pravda and The Lay of Igor's Host. Many writings between the 13th. and 14th. centuries are in Russian. The treaty of the Prince of Smolensk, Mstislav Davidovich, with Riga and the Gothic shore, is distinguished by a special Russian style.

1. Syn Otechestva, 1822, Part 76, No. 13, pp 249 - 261.

In answer to Katenin's careless claim that the Manuscripts were written in Barbaric language, Bestuzhev ironically remarked:

I am neither a Gre~~ek~~ nor a Frenchman, and therefore I rather blame my own ignorance and times than accuse the chroniclers of barbaric style and ignorance in the manuscripts I seek the expressions, words and caprices of my native language.

In the dispute with Shishkov, Grech and Katenin, Bestuzhev advocated living conversational speech, combined with a more cautious and sensible implementation of Old Church Slavonicisms, and cited Lomonosov, who had successfully blended the elements of Old Church Slavonic with the common language of the people. Not denying that Old Church Slavonic was one of the sources of contemporary literary language, Bestuzhev in Decembrist fashion expressed the need for employing separate Slavonic words in modern poetry and gave a clear-cut analysis of his attitude towards Old Church Slavonic words. Only resonant words capable of lending loftiness, dignity and sonority to poetic language, were to be culled from Old Church Slavonic:

The Slavonic language now serves us as an arsenal: we take from it меч and шлем but no longer clothe our heroes in armour бычачьею кожей; and we dress up in охабни only for a fancy-dress ball. We use the resonant words: вертоград, ланиты, десница, but leave for the worms: семо, свамо, говяда, and so forth.

Bestuzhev welcomed the solemn turns of Slavonic speech, corresponding to the agitational tone of Decembrist Poetry. * Old Church Slavonic phraseology, taken in the general context of contemporary actuality and political ideas, often assumed an abstract freedom-loving character. European airs and graces were to be eliminated, French refinement was to be extirpated; coarseness and simplicity were preferable. The Decembrists sought the clear, expressive word to denote political ideas and to form lofty, declamatory poetry impregnated with civil enthusiasm.

Bestuzhev's prose gains more than it loses in his usage of Old Church Slavonic words. Although he shuns the orientation towards "lofty" style advocated by Shishkov and Katenin and relies mainly on "light" style, yet he insists on inserting lofty words so as to lend weight and solidity to an otherwise excessively sweet, smooth and urbane style in the manner

of Karamzin. It will be noted that the Old Church Slavonic words interpolated in the text at varying intervals denote, in particular, articles of clothing, armour, and weapons.

Бровь приблицы надвинуты на брови... берутся за
адаа виденные дотопе самопалы.... *

но латами вытертый колет из замши, рыцарский
воротник видны под епанчою.... **

Взошло солнце, и, по сказкам ранних кочев, они видели
двух незнакомых всадников, закутанных в охабни, которые
торопливо ехали по Владимирской дороге. ***

This type of effect serves to add solemnity and a more historical tone to the story, although on a somewhat superficial plane, since it is historical spirit that counts rather than the super-imposing of high-sounding and impressive vocabulary if a writer wishes to capture the verve and realism of a past era.

(b) Style.

As far as style is concerned, Bestuzhev's application of it had its root in his own personal temperament, and in the influences of Western European romanticism and of Karamzin. He admits to the presence of his own individual nature in his style in several confessions in various letters. To A.M. Andreyev on the 9th. April, 1831, he wrote,

As for glitter, the remark is quite justified, but it is in my nature. Whoever knows my usual conversation, will recollect that I involuntarily speak in metaphors and comparisons, and Nikolay Ivanovich (Grech) did not call my sallies "the pearls of Bestuzhev" for nothing. *

In a letter to his brother Pavel, dated the 13th. December, 1833, he defended himself and vindicated his use of language:

As for glitter, it is because I am aliveModify my style, and you pluck it, you castrate it. **

In Sailor Nikitin, he says:

My pen is a wilful fiddlestick, a witch's broom, a rider's horse. Yes: astride my pen I am a free Cossack, I can roam on the paper, without orders, wherever my fancy takes me. ***

Western European romanticism afforded Bestuzhev the stylistic models for expressing his own particular natural propensities. Style for the romantics was the best means for putting forward their idealistic world-view, and their special attention to the spiritual life of the individual compelled them to adapt language to suit the transmission of the subtlest movements of the human soul. The romantics aimed to create the picturesque from the philosophical, the artistic from the academic, and to organise language afresh for the transmitting of feelings and sensations. In this respect the poets of the sentimental trend had already paved the way for the romantics by replacing the dry, abstract style of pseudo-classicism with a more concrete poetic style. The poetry of sentimentalism brought into use a whole series of realistic and at the same time picturesque images and expressions for the designation of the emotions and moods of man and his relationship with nature. Adjectives and verbs denoting loneliness, gloom, melancholy, pining away, trembling, and so on became a usual phenomenon of poetic style. In Bestuzhev's stories these adjectives and verbs make up a considerable part of

his style. On every page, occur adjectives such as:-

одинокый, тусклый, мрачный, злобещий, пустынный, грустный,
унылый, задумчивый, топительный, утомленный, угрюмый,
несчастный,

and verbs such as:- гаснуть, вянуть, меркнуть,
трепетать, бледнеть!

Sometimes we get entire combinations of words which are infused
with romantic connotations, as in the following passage:

твоя душа сливалась и замирала с звуками
любовных припевов; ты млела в каком-то
сладостном забытьи, и долго-долго слышались
тебе отрядные звуки знакомого голоса, и взоры
певца ласкали, пронизали сердце.

In addition Bestuzhev's stories overflow with an abundance of
adjectives of colour like белый, синий, черный, вороний, лиловый,
малиновый, and more complex, poetic ones, like светлокудрый,
белоснежный, белогривый, золоторогий, золотоверхий,
серебровейный, and with mass upon mass of nouns and verbs denoting noise,

like скрип, крик, бреньчанье, хлопанье, треск, свист, отголосок, ржание, мычанье, брацание, звон, шум, звук, and греметь, раздаться, отзываться, журчать.

These literary effects combine to form a prose that is the culmination of dazzling colour and deafening noise.

Bestuzhev's usage of adjectives is sometimes adventurous and picturesque, and stands close to the romantic dictionary. For example, these epithets are quite bold and diverse: белогривые валы,¹ + в песу драмучем,² нахмуренные облака,³ небесные очи,⁴ мертвая тишина,⁵ гробовые ели,⁶ кровавый отблеск,⁷

and these are pretentious, tinged with Bestuzhev's habitual lack of restraint: кровавыми слезами,⁸ самую скучную скуку,⁹ в безбрежном море снегов.¹⁰

Enlivening his style with a host of images, Bestuzhev chooses similes that are still more forceful than his epithets. There are simple ones - бледная как воск,¹¹ бледен как полотно,¹² more expressive and colourful ones - красив как утренняя звездочка,¹³ пылок как Арабская лошадь,¹⁴ прелестные как майское утро,¹⁵ нежен как дамская перчатка, гибок как страусовое перо,¹⁶

+ At this stage, nos. will be used instead of asterisks wherever necessary in order to avoid confusion.

more complicated ones including a verb - как море, шумело собрание,¹
все было тихо как в могиле,² сверкающие глаза их зажглись
во мраке, будто свечи,³ сердце ее распустилось, как роза,⁴
любовь, как иной цвет на бесплодном утесе растет и
в безнадежности,⁵ and finally extended ones that become
intertwined with the narrative and thereby become an essential component
part of his style -

Как подстреленный орел рвется в путях, завидя добычу,
так билось в груди юноши сердце, когда в княжнем саду
увидел он Ольгу.⁶

Быстро, не озираясь, неся он, будто русалка гналась по
путям, будто хотел умчаться от изменнической стрелы.⁷

But once again Bestuzhev mars the entire outcome by inserting numerous
pretentious similes at every possible chance, on the most absurd occasions :

Ярость исчезла, как тающий снег на раскаленном железе.⁸

Я зевал, как Кремлевская пушка.⁹

Как пыл сражения улегается под дождем, смывающим
кровь с лица земли, улеглись страсти в душе Владимира.¹⁰

Как чугуинные змеи, таясь в траве, пушки вдруг разинули
пасть свою."¹¹

"Ваши титулы так темны и долги, как сентябрьская ночь."¹²

Мысли, сверкнув, исчезают - как исчезает на долине
мгновенная Тень сокола поднебесного.¹³

In order to give his style some sort of substantiality, Bestuzhev avoided abstract words and expressions, concrete nouns and straightforward sentences, instead constantly substituting plastic art forms. He rarely calls a spade a spade, but prefers to use roundabout, tortuous phrases and vivid metaphors. Directness is to be shunned at all costs. There are innumerable instances of this throughout Bestuzhev's work, until they weary the reader: Simeon Voyeslav calls his daughter -

" мою лучшую заветную жемчужину " ¹

and the hero of A Novel in Seven Letters calls Adele -

" воздушною полубогинею пери, порхающею в испарении цветов." ²

To express Roman's poverty, Simeon refers to him as a person,

" у которого нет три-девяи снопов для брачной постели,
у которого и любимый конь пасется муравою приятелей...
у нее корабли в море, у него - журавли в небе." ³

Instead of saying "she fell asleep", Bestuzhev metaphorically states,

ангел сна осенил ее крылом своим ⁴

and instead of "dawn rose over the mountains" -

зимняя заря облила своей воздушной кровью снежные
темена гор. ⁵

When it is a question of young people being impetuous, we read :

сердце в восемнадцать лет - порох, одна смелая искра -
и прощай спокойствие. ⁶

Very often in Bestuzhev we come across (1) the personification of inanimate objects and (2) pictorial substantiation of abstract ideas; this technique likewise is sometimes spoiled by Bestuzhev's insistence on pretentiousness.

(1) Кудри белоснежных перьев играют с ветром.¹

дремлющий лес не шелохнёт.²

солнце в лоне туманов, без блистания, как бы в раздумье,
стоит на краю небосклона и, вдруг воспрянув от вод,
величественно устремляется по небу.³

(2) "Тогда райская птичка - надежда летела передо мной
и манила вперед своими блестящими крыльями."⁴

"мое воображение, привычное только летать, а не плавать,
опустило мотыльковые крылья свои."⁵

Bestuzhev's style becomes especially bright when he deals with the subject favoured by the romantics - the eternal drama of life, its fateful dualism, the struggle between the sources of spirit and matter, the infinite and the finite, ideal and reality. In this case Bestuzhev uses the method of antithesis which was popular among the romantics. Ronald is racked by the gap between the apparently so-near object and its real unattainability:

"Быть так близко подле нее и не быть с ней, слышать
ее голос и не видать ее лица, внимать ее походки,
и только."⁶

Rulers may succeed one another but their subjects always remain the same:

Изменились князья Новгорода; зато
новгородцы остались те же. ¹

Contradictory feelings exist side by side:

радость и скука — самые близкие соседи. ²

Time can alter anyone's soul from one extreme to another:

Тогда душа его была как голубь — теперь
стала чернее ворона. ³

Men crave gold but fear iron rule, therefore

Возжи, которыми правят людей, сплетены из железа и золота. ⁴

It is impossible to crush human nature with the traditions of kin or position, and so "в гербе (его не было) сердца но оно билось в груди отеческой." ⁵

All the remaining aspects of Bestuzhev's prose are closely inter-related with the stories of Karamzin. Despite the fact that Journey to Revel was in purpose and content based on the Radishchevian type of travelogue, it borrowed its framework and stylistic mode of narration from Karamzin and Dupaty. Evidence of this can be found in Bestuzhev's verse epigraph:

You wanted me — and I promised,
My exacting friends,
To devote to stories
My leisure and short-lived rest,
And to describe to you, like Dupaty,
The adventures of my journey. ⁶

Interconnected with the stylistic methods and with the sentimental philosophy of this genre were Sterne and Rousseau. Twice Bestuzhev in fact refers directly to these two great sentimentalist adherents, on both occasions lamenting his inability to match these forerunners; he asks,

"Sterne, where is your pen?"

talks of Tristram Shandy, * and exclaims,

"Why can't I pour forth my feelings into thoughts, and my thoughts into eloquence, like Rousseau?" **

Journey to Reval revives the traditional genre of hybrid travel with all its characteristic ingredients: epistolary treatment, addresses to friends, introduction of verses, and descriptions of meetings with people and places he visits, from theatres to houses, inns to churches, towns to villages, libraries to ballrooms.

Alongside the usual appearance of verses in important places, such as the waterfall at Narva, the direct transition from prose to verse and the return to basic prose text is done without any thematic motivation. Copying Sterne, Bestuzhev employed witticisms, punning devices, proverbs and sententious expressions.

Witticisms, the like of "а наконец, видя что на гнев не
выехать из Каскова, по-философски решился отвести свое
сердце бутылкою доброго вина" ¹ and "(он)
спал на лекциях чтоб не дремать в трактирах." ²

are numerous, and Bestuzhev even stresses the comic aspect when he adds:

Можете вообразить себе эту комическую сцену! ³

Puns are in strong evidence. Bestuzhev discusses the origin of the name
"Reval" in the following terms:

Правда, многие антикварины утверждают, будто имя
Reval происходит от сокращения слов Regenfall
т.е. падения дождя. ⁴

He then makes a pun between "Reval" and "Rehfall", and "Reef" or "Riff".

Manifold proverbial statements adorn the text; among them are:

Хорошо в гостях, говорит пословица, но где лучше,
как не дома. ⁵

Надобно путешествовать, чтоб научиться, говорят все;
я думаю: надобно учиться, чтобы с пользою
путешествовать. ⁶

Aphoristic sayings are beyond number and include:

Не так ли, думал я, исчезнем и мы! ⁷

Здесь узлы мерного этикета не тянут молодости, и
не скучают старости. ⁸

Здесь уже знают тех, кого любят, и верно любят с котфурми
знаются. ⁹

In the same way, the stylistic methods in Journey to Reval were distributed amongst Bestuzhev's tales providing a conglomeration of puns, jokes, proverbs and comparisons. Puns in the manner of -

"ты за эскадроном в замке строил воздушные замки." ¹

"доходнее резать турецкие головы, чем сажать турецкие огурцы." ²

"голос ее есть смешение соловьиного с совиным." ³

and witty phrases like -

"они горят одною страстью - к стеклу, то есть он к стакану, а она к зеркалу." ⁴

"вопреки Лесажу и Мольеру, я выздоровел." ⁵

"воздушная соседка ее - ей бы давно порз с нашего неба." ⁶

maxims like -

"сердце не слуга - ему не прикажешь!" ⁷

"слезами не наполнить моря." ⁸

"Кто старое помянет, тому глаз вон." ⁹

"Чему быть, того не миновать." ¹⁰

У страха глаза велики, говорит пословица. "

pervade all the tales of Bestuzhev.

Bestuzhev goes so far as to apologise for the presence of these stylistics in his account:

Dry learnedness, unseasoned with jokes, will in no way please the taste of our public one must attract the attention of readers like electric with witticisms. ¹²

He begs the reader's pardon too for the disordered composition of this work, which is immature and merely transitional, full of unexpected transitions and digressions, impetuosity and unjustified changes of standpoint, and a corresponding style, asking him to forgive "a flighty cavalier for his uneven, undistinguished sentences and (his) throwing them down from a pen sharpened by a sabre, in the quick intervals of amusements and weariness, even under the cold wing of sleep". *

As for the material itself of his journey it acquires an independent significance, for from this wide material, lyrical digressions, and historical sketches, could be extracted a basis for the writing of separate stories - just as The Revel Tournament was conceived. Furthermore Eisen Castle and Wenden Castle are constructed on the foundations of an episode from a journey. These stories respectively begin:

On the last campaign of the Guards, while hunting beyond the Narva **

and

They say our route has been altered and our regiment will halt at
Wenden. ***

Roman and Olga, more than all the other tales, bears the undeniable traces of the sentimental stamp. It assumes wholly from Karamzin smoothness and pleasantness of language and the typically Karamzinian intonation. This

single illustration indicates how alike were the intonations of Karamzin and Bestuzhev. In Natal'ya, the Boyar's Daughter, we read:

Сердце ее лстело к нему навстречу, но робость
говорила ей: "Останься!" Красавица повиновалась
сему последнему голосу, только с мучительным
принуждением, с великою тоскою

и хотя тихий голос из глубины сердца, как будто
бы из отдаленной пещеры, спрашивал ее:

"Что ты делаешь, безрассудная?"

Но другой голос, гораздо сильнейший, в том же
самом сердце отвечал ей:

"Люблю!"

A parallel extract is contained in Roman and Olga:

Красавица вырывалась напрасно; рассудок
советовал ей: "Беги!", сердце шептало
"Останься!" "Что скажут добрые люди?" —
повторял разум. "Что станет с милым, когда
ты скроешься?" — запечало сердце.

Еще борьба страха и стыдливости не
кончилась, а Ольга нехотя, сама не зная как,
сидела уже с Романом рука об руку.¹

When Bestuzhev introduces sentiments, that is, rhetorical comments, into his stories, he is under the immediate influence of Karamzin, in whose writing there are many analogical examples. This short list of Bestuzhev's personal sentiments will serve as some idea of what is meant:

Есть глаза, которые с первого взгляда вызывают
откровенность и заверяют дружбу.²

Быстро текут слова повести; не скоро делается
дело.³

Неустранимость мужчины вливает в грудь девушки
какое-то возвышенное к нему уважение. Соучастие
дружит, сближает с страдальцем, и любовь, как
тиховейный ветер, закрадывается в душу. ¹

Но старые люди редко ее прощают юношам. ²

Женский ум слаб — он видит только то, что перед глазами. ³

Совесть упрекает нас сильнее, когда решимость на
худое дело напрасна, ибо досада неудачи ее
подстрекает. ⁴

These sentiments enter the speeches of the hero, since there was little differentiation in Bestuzhev's tales between the narrator and the hero; their language acquires thus an even greater degree of rhetoric until it is similar to the monologues of classical tragedies.

"Любовь девушки — лед внешний: поплачет она;
поскучает... и другой жених оботрет ее слезы
бобрovým рукавом шубы своей." ⁵

(Simcon Voyeslav).

"Есть страсти, которые вспыхивают, как порох,
и горят до конца как свеча." ¹

(Ronald).

"Кто не верит чистой любви, тот недостойн
взаимности." ²

(Olga).

"из людского мнения не шубу шить." ³ (Ivan Khvorostinin).

An entire dialogue is constructed out of sentiments when Nichtovich and Mechin exchange opinions lengthily on the influence of the weather on the human temperament.

Since the sentiment is only static in the sense that it takes no part in the active movement of the plot or the alteration of a situation, its insertion into the narrative or the speech of characters is oftentimes accompanied by a transition from the present to the past tense; hence the sentiment becomes an inseparable part of Bestuzhev's style.

Удар наемного кинжала есть скорейшее
средство избавиться от сильного неприятеля.

Эмма как помешанная бросилась к Всеславу, ... ⁴

Часто забывают смерть в припадках чести на
поздниках, ее не замечают в блестящей мантии
славы на сражениях; Но не тогда, как она
является во всей наготе, со всеми ужасами
неизбежной казни. Эвальд молился ⁵

"Однако ж, по какой-то пагубной привычке,
я не мог жить вовсе без людей, с которыми
не мог ужиться. Такова-то цепь общества;
снять ее мы не в силах, а разорвать не
решился. Наступил на престол и Годунов." *

A second noticeable characteristic in the prose of Bestuzhev and Karamzin was the forced introduction of rhetorical intonations in the form of interrogative and exclamatory phrases, which turn the tale into a kind of lyric poem. Karamzin employs these intonations primarily as the author's commentaries and observations on the actions of the characters, but more often as a direct lyrical address to the character from the author; to Erast he cries:

Безрассудный, молодой человек! знаешь ли свое
сердце? Всегда ли можешь отвечать за свои
движения? Всегда ли рассудок есть царь
чувств твоих?!

and to Liiza he laments:

Ах! Лиза, Лиза! Где ангел-хранитель твой,
где твоя невинность? +

The same exists in Bestuzhev; he addresses Olga as follows:

Бедная девушка! какая участь ждет тебя? ¹

and earlier -

Покойся, душа непорочная! Ты не одну еще ночь
встретишь тоскою бессонницы, не одно изголовье
смочишь слезами, и долго тебе ронять их
на ветер, долго ждать друга милого! ²

Bestuzhev turns to Lake Chudskoye as if to a living person:

О Пейпусь, Пейпусь! сколько раз смывал
ты с берегов своих кровь Германскую и
Русскую! сколько раз твои волны и ледяное
покрывало твоё багрились ею! ³

+ Karamzin, op. cit., p 615.

Bestuzhev develops Karamzin still further, when his execution of Karamzin's method is achieved with even greater emphatic accumulation of questions and exclamations, which begin to function to create a specific style. This extract is constructed of equal interrogative and exclamatory phrases, interwoven to form an entire fabric of prose narrative:

Добрая старушка ! для чего нет у тебя ответов
от любви чародейки ? ты бы вылечила ими свою
барышню от кручины, от горести, от истомы
сердечной. Или зачем сердце твое утратило
память юности ? Ты бы увидела страсть милой
Ольги, заглушила б еще в цвету — советами и
рассеянием. Но ты сама раздувала пламень, сама
напевала ей песни Романовы, хвалила его нрав и статью.
Беда юноше когда влюбленная красавица только думает что
его любит, горе девушке, если она любит не ложно ! В шум
боевой, походной жизни, с чужеземными красавицами, забывает
молодец прежнюю милую, но в тиши девичьего терема
гнездятся томительные страсти и любовь глубоко
впивается в невинную душу. Ах ! зачем добрая няня, ты не
ведать отговоров от любви-чародейки ? Зачем старостью
отуманились очи твои ? *

His innovation extends to alternating these lyrical addresses with narrative phrases in the past tense.

только ты не спишь и не дремлешь, прелестная
Ольга! И сильно бьется сердце девическое,
высоко воздымается грудь твоя; ожидание,
страх и раскаяние тебя терзают! Любимая
няня уже распустила сняла ,
прочитала , спрыснула осенила
..... нашептала и ступила *

Прости, в последний раз, все, что семнадцать лет
меня радовало! Простите, добрые, милые родители!
Ольга залилась горячими слезами упала
излила

"Где найдешь ты покой, дочь послушная, без
благословения родителей, тобой убитых?"
Тронутая Ольга молилась с новым благоговением
и благодать излетела на ее сердце светлою
мыслию. ***

Besides this, Bestuzhev uses rhetorical questions and exclamations as continuations and developments in the plot and action:

Чья тень мелькает в парах, изменяющих
току реки в глуши дикого леса ?

Не привидение ли то, страж клада князей
Герсики, погибших в дебрях ?

Или то мстительный вайделот исторгается
в час полуночи для призвания чарами
адских духов на стубу пришельцев —
разрушителей Перкуна ?.....

но где ж его стрелы ? где его чуткие псы ?

Нет, это не запоздалый стрелец. *

Especially noteworthy are Bestuzhev's dialogues, which are for the most part built on this system of emphatic intonations:

"Рыцарь ! Именем чести и доброй славы невинной
супруги твоей требую доказательств ! "

"Невинной ? Давно ли волки проповедуют невинность
лисиц ? Давно ли русские говорят о чести ?" *

(Vseslav & Von Nordeck).

"Как ! его отбили ? его увезли ? Духи адские !
Когда перестанете вы играть мною ? Тридцать
лет искал я его, нашел, и потерял в одну минуту !
но тебя, Евпраксия, тебя никакие силы не вырвут из рук
моих — ты заплатишь мне за отца своего !" **

(Schreiterfeld).

"Отвечай, где совершил ты преступления ?
Кудз бросил его тело ? Скажи, чья кровь
дымится на руках твоих ? "

"Эммз, Эммз ! и ты могла подумать, что я
способен на такое низкое дело !" ***

(Emma & Vseslav).

In Karamzin the latter four types of usage are practically unknown, and even so these intonations are only sporadic, but Bestuzhev constructs a whole system of rhetorical narrative from them. Rhetorical tinsel was one of the main tendencies of Bestuzhev, figuring in all his work. Everywhere he prefers a lofty, declamatory phrase to a simple, direct one.

Rhythmatisation of a sentence was a basic element in Karamzin. Bestuzhev's technique of rhythmatisation was based on irregular syntactic dismemberment - unsymmetrically positioned caesurae and irregularity in the number of stresses in adjacent phrases - and yet on an order obtained by a rhythm which holds the reader spellbound; in the subsequent examples clauses in a sentence are linked by different parts of speech and depend on the impulse of rhythm; the reader, falling under the influence of this impulse, feels the flow of the sentence as a rhythmically constructed whole. Syntactic parallelism is an apt name for this rhythmic system.

In this example, parallelism is achieved by employing preposition, adjective and noun in the instrumental case, and adjective and noun in the genitive case:

"Желал бы забыть, и позабыл тебе сказать, что Астон
имел жену, со всеми недостатками дурного воспитания,
со всеми пороками злого характера,
со всеми прихотями ничтожной гордости." *

A verb followed by an adverbial clause holds together this sentence:

"Не помню, как вышел я на верх;
не помню, как посадили меня в шлюпку;
знаю только, что огромным валом опрокинуло
нас у самого борта." 1

A verb of action in each phrase constitutes the link here:

"Я кинулся в море, долго боролся с набегающими
валами, и наконец достиг ее и с нею выплыл
до мелкого места." 2

An imperative verb at the start of each phrase creates the rhythmical stress in these two sentences:

"Не делай же ее несчастною,
Не заставь крушиться родных на твоё позднее раскаяние.
Послушай совета от друга и брата чтоб после не
плакаться богу;
исполни мою просьбу, а молодых мольбу —
отдай Ольгу Роману!" 3

Rhythm can be acquired by a commencing infinitive verb also:

"Бежать!
Совершить дело неслыханное,
бросить край родимый,
оббеславить навек родителей,
прогневать Бога и святую Софию!" 4

Adjectives too can serve to impose a steady, pulsating rhythm:

" Роман Ясенский хорош и пригож ---
горазд повесть словь на вечах, в бесадах;
удал на игрушках военных,
и на все стышлен,
ко всем приветлив. " 1

Even mere conjunctions and prepositions fulfil this function:

" Или забыли запущенных торжеских братьей своих,
Или нет в Новгороде сердец новгородских,
Или не стало мечей,
Или мы разучились владеть ими ? " 2

" Я мечтал о радостной встрече моей с Софиею,
о ее стуженье,
об объяснении,
о супружестве,
о первом дне его. " 3

Nouns in the accusative case, that is objects of a verb in immediate sequence, maintain the role of connecting link:

" мне хотелось, чтобы княжна любила во мне
не мундир,
не мазурку,
не острые слова,
но меня самого без всяких видов. " 4

Bestuzhev's early poetry has been largely ignored or passed over by critics in cursory reference. This is hardly surprising since these poems do not contain anything of striking beauty or note, and certainly there is nothing memorable about them. Bestuzhev obviously had reached the conclusion that poetry was not his true métier and that it was best to leave this field of Decembrist activity to those better qualified - Ryleyev, Kuchelbecker, Odoyevsky and Glinka. His revolutionary and satirical poems, written conjointly with Ryleyev, are far superior; perhaps this is due to Ryleyev's primacy. A translation of 1818 from La Harpe, entitled Spirit of the Storm, is marked chiefly by pomposity, unsure usage of word order, and an undertone of strain and tension:

Отважным Гамою ведомы корабли

В безвестный Океан за славою текли.

..... "Познай во мне царя тобой струимых вод." *

"Light poetry" attained its zenith in French poetry at the end of the 18th. century and in Russian poetry a little later in the verses of Batyushkov. This type of poetry was set in a framework of refined verse and was full of the joy of life in its depiction of the intimate world of man; it clashed with the abstract, depersonalised poetry of classicism, where the poet, in order to express his problems and moods, turned to images from ancient mythology. "Light poetry" however was strongly linked with life, and so Epicurean poetry and civil poetry sometimes existed harmoniously together in the work of one poet. The glorification of the pleasures in life and political enthusiasm were prominent traits in Bestuzhev's poetry, Epicurean and civil lyric blending

freely and organically. In To Krenitsin, of 1818, he advocates the necessity for being happy in youth, for patiently reforging the iron shackles of fate, for reconciling oneself to one's lot, since

Нам радости даны часами,
Но грусть свинцовыми крылами
Вперед нас двигает годами;
А невозвратна жизнь — летит. *

He advises the reader to live for today and enjoy the blessing of life continuously and unrestrainedly:

Последуй дружества совету:
Поставь лишь радости зз мету,
А скуку на ветер пускай;
То с чашей нектара златою,
То граций с резвою толпою
Спеши знакомою тропою
И в счастье счастье воспевай! **

The latter are elegiac, intimate, lyrical motifs. But on the other hand the majority of the remainder of his early poems are impregnated with political and social criticism.⁺ They are weighty and overburdened in style, but compensate somewhat for this shortcoming by their sincerity and fire. In these poems, an extraordinary paradox is salient: although Bestuzhev was a romantic by conviction and views, yet in stylistic practice his poetry follows enlightened classicism of the 18th. century.

⁺ This has already been discussed in the first chapters.

This characteristic is not peculiar to Bestuzhev's poetry but is proper to all the Decembrist poets. They are promoters of didactic, socially - enlightened, and satirical poetry.

These poems are overcharged with burdensome lines and abstruse references that are difficult to understand and annoy even the most diligent reader.

Скажи, к чему, теперь я слышу, говорят,
Слипавшей мудрости цинический наряд?
Сей добродетели Обуховской больницы
Давно весьма давно не носят средь столицы. *

(Imitation of Boileau's First Satire,
1819).

И, словом, все жильцы пермесской колыбели
Судить сапых себя архонтами засели;
..... Смотрите, радуйтесь, как в недре двух столиц
Питомцы Фебовы и девяти сестриц.... **

(To Several Poets, 1819).

Near the Camp and Mikhail Tverskoy easily supersede in style the other civil poems, because the lines are shorter and less complex, the vocabulary is not so ostentatious and solemn, the word order is more straightforward, and there is more lyrical flow and harmony:

Близ стана юноша прекрасный
Стоял, склонившись над рекой,
На воды взор вперивши ясный,
На лук опершись стальной.
Его волнистыми волосами
Вечерний ветерок играл,
Свет солнца с запада лучами
В щите багряном погасал. ***

(Near the Camp, 1818 - 19).

В темнице мрачной и глухой
Ночную праздную порой
Лампада темная мелькает
И слабым светом озаряет
В углу темницы двух мужей. *

(Mikhail Tverskov, 1824).

Just as in Bestuzhev's prose, similes, metaphors and epithets of diverse and venturous kinds are common, as are rhetorical sentiments, exclamations and questions. These are not as catastrophic as in Bestuzhev's prose, for they help to put some vitality and colour into an otherwise pale and uninspiring poetic style.

The agitational songs, however, employ the incisive expression and the unequivocal word; there are no turgid, tendentious, stentorian lines, but uncompromising, trenchant and imperious statements. Instead of Bestuzhev's prolific and nebulous explanations, we get laconic words, that summon up an entire world of thought in the mind of the readers at whom these songs were aimed - the peasants and the soldiers. Recondite, circuitous and specious phrases are absent; in their place are simple, direct statements of fact. The lines are terse and powerful:

Ты скажи, говори,
Как в России цари
Правят.

Ты скажи поскорей,
Как в России царей
Давят. **

(Say, Tell Me, 1823).

Царь наш — немец русский,
Носит мундир узкий.

Ай да царь, эй да царь,
Православный государь.

Царствует он где же ?

Всякий день в манеже.

Трусит он законов,
Трусит он масонов. *

(Our Tsar is a Russian German, 1823).

Их и учат, их и мучат
Ни свет, ни заря,
Слава !

Разве нет у них рук,
Чтоб избавиться от мук ?
Слава !

Да Семеновский полк
Покажет им толк !
Слава ! **

(Along the Fontanka River).

In addition popular proverbs are included so that the songs ring true in the people's ears:

А до Бога высоко,
До царя далеко.
Да мы сами
Ведь с усами,
Так мотай себе на ус. *

Finally words are put on the lips of the people themselves, and the test of their poetic value is that they sound natural and realistic:

Ах, тошно мне
И в родной стороне;
Всё в неволе,
В тяжкой доле
Видно, век вековать.

Долго ль русский народ
Будет рухлядью господ,
И людьми,
Как скотами,
Долго ль будут торговать ?

Кто же нас кабалил,
Кто им барство присудил,
И над нами,
Бедняками,
Будто с плетью посадил ?

Глупость прежних крестьян
Стала воле в изъян,
И свобода
У народа
Силой бар задушена. ++

Some of the songs are social satires, full of topical allusions relating exactly to events in St. Petersburg between 1820 and 1822:

Где Магницкий молчит,
А Мордавинов кричит
Больно.

Где не думает Греч
Что его будут сечь
Больно. *

(Ah. Where are Those Islands, 1823).

А граф Аракчеев
Злодей из злодеев
.....

..... А Потапов дурный
Генерал дежурный. **

(Our Tsar is a Russian German).

They are humorous and sardonic, as well as having a concrete political meaning.

In Ah. I Feel Wretched everything is named plainly and comprehensibly in peasant and military style, energetically and decisively, without colouring or allegory. The movement of these verses, slow and laboured, with the recurring transition from long lines to short ones, perfectly conveys the idea of the people's hesitation:

А что силой отнято,
Силой выручим мы то.
И в приволье,
На раздолье
Стариною заживем.

А теперь господа
Грабят нас без стыда,
И обманом
Их карманом
Стала наша мошна.

Они кожу с нас дерут,
Мы посеём — они жнут.
Они воры,
Живодеры,
Как миявки, кровь сосут. *

Bestuzhev's "ritual" songs are written "in the language of the people," **
as Ryleyev had invited him to do. He found his sources in the Russian
national song, in Russian folklore, but whereas these themes had
originally been peaceful, in the hands of Bestuzhev they are reduced to
political revolutionary bitterness. The melody, stylistic expressions
and interconnection of lines are preserved, but the essence is different.

Where folklore propagated patriarchal extollation of the tsar, in Bestuzhev we find glorification of anti-monarchical freedom; where folklore described inoffensive, embellished fairy-tale ceremony, in Bestuzhev the image of a peasant armed with an axe, whose goal is reprisal on the tyrant, moves ominously on the same backcloth.

But it is in the realm of critical analysis that Bestuzhev's most remarkable triumph resides. Belinsky, the greatest of Russian critics, owed him a good deal as a predecessor, asserting:

"In general our literature is greatly obliged to Marlinsky, as a critic".¹

In the literary ideals he promulgated, in the style of his articles, and in his appreciation of authors, he could rarely be faulted. He insisted on national spirit and political content of literary works, a concept that was revolutionary at a time when the general trend was towards imitation of foreign writers and glossy, magniloquent, and sickly-sweet travelogues, poetry or stories. In his appraisal of the majority of authors, his remarks are either pithy and sharp, as in -

Легкие стихотворения Карамзина ознаменованы
чувством: они извлекают невольный вздох из
сердца девственного и слезу из тех, которые
все испытали. *

1. Belinsky, op. cit., vol. 4. p 30.

or poetic and picturesque, as in -

блеснул Карамзин на горизонте прозы, подобно
радуга после потопа. *

The style, therefore, was an integral part of these reviews, inspiring otherwise boring judgments with beauty and interest:

Гений красноречия и поэзии, гражданин всех стран,
ровесник всех возрастов народов, не был чужд и
предкам нашим. **

Время невидимо сеет просвещения, и туман,
лежащий теперь на поле русской словесности,
хотя мешает побегу, но дает большую твердость
колосьям и обещает богатую жатву. ***

For the sake of completeness, it might be helpful to point out the highlights of Bostad's later work. Although this falls beyond the scope of the present work, it will go to show in some way the state of Conclusion. Bostad's literary talent.

Bostad's later work, composed in exile, is a continuation of the same themes and stylistics of his early work. In all his later tales the style is still an amalgamation of archaic sayings, idioms, chosen turns of phrase, epithets, comparisons, metaphorical expressions, and rhetorical intentions, in both dialogue and narrative. Gothic traditions have not entirely disappeared and can be witnessed in such tales as *An Evening at a Summer Inn* in 1881. Romantic plots, digressions, and incidents abound everywhere. In romance, and especially legends, characterisation, Bostad follows his early tradition. His heroes oppose society, such as Eirik and Vork in *The Bright Day* and *Good and Evil* in *The Light*. Even from its minor like *White Star*, in the tale of the poor man, who is the champion of nobility of spirit are more revealed in their personal life as individuals than the most cultured man, as is shown in *Legends*; are combined with nature scenes and patriotic such as *White Star* and *Legend* or express themselves in those of nature - for *Legend* and *Legend* Bostad's work in *Legend* and in *Legend*.

- (a) For the sake of completeness, it might be helpful to point out the highlights of Bestuzhev's later work. Although this falls beyond the scope of the present work, it will go to show in some way the static nature of Bestuzhev's literary talent.

Bestuzhev's later work, composed in exile, is a continuation of the romantic thematics and stylistics of his early work. In all his later tales the style is still an amalgamation of numberless sayings, witticisms, clever turns of phrase, epithets, comparisons, metaphorical expressions, and rhetorical intonations, in both dialogue and narrative. Gothic tendencies have not entirely disappeared and can be witnessed in such tales as An Evening at a Caucasian Spa in 1824. Romantic plots, digressions, and incidents stand out everywhere. In romantic, and especially Byronic, characterisation, Bestuzhev follows his early traditions. His heroes oppose society, such as Pravin and Vera in The Frigate Hope and Gremin and Olga in The Test; escape from its snares like Mulla-Mur, in the tale of the same name, who is the incarnation of nobility of spirit; are more merciful in their primeval life as mountaineers than the most cultured races, as is shown in Ammalat-Bek; are endowed with supreme courage and patriotism such as Nikitin and Belozor; or express themselves in throes of passion - Lev Kolontay and Prince Serebryanny in Raids and in lofty

aspirations to some great ideal - the dreamers of The Cuirassier and Raids. Bestuzhev also continues with tales of history such as Raids, society life like The Test and The Frigate Hope and military adventure as in Ammalat-Bek, as well as with travelogues, for example, Road to Kuba, Farewell to the Caspian, and many others.

Bestuzhev's most outstanding improvement in his later tales is his adaptation of the principle of local colour; his Caucasus, with its mountains, ravines, rivers, and valleys, is vividly and quite remarkably represented in all its aspects of natural beauty. Even the social tales give to some extent the feeling of the character and heart of Russian society of that period. His poetry too improves in this respect - local colour and lyricism becoming a necessary ingredient, and some of his lines are superb (later to be copied by Lermontov). As for his criticism, it retains all the inherent virtues of his early work in that field.

(b) This thesis has tried to demonstrate the opposing views of literary critics on Bestuzhev's political writing and formulate some conclusion, and secondly to put him in context among both Russian and Western European authors.

Bestuzhev's most dismal failure was his inability to realise the ideals he preached concerning national spirit and political content in his own literary productions. The political content was too well concealed, and caused even leading critics to formulate misguided opinions. National spirit is abysmally absent and can be found to some extent only in his Caucasian tales. Furthermore, the fascination induced by his style soon vanished, and is now absolutely non-existent. This style now strikes one as nothing but glitter and sparkles and tinsel, as superficial gloss, grandiloquent ranting, and cleverly attuned hyperbole.

Nevertheless, his success in Russia of the 1820's and 1830's was unprecedented. Whatever might be said in criticism of Bestuzhev, the public loved his work. It suited the epoch: after the abstract, dry reasoning and strictly regimented regulations of classicism, and the sweet urbanity of the Sentimentalists, Bestuzhev's stories came to the public as fresh, startling phenomena. It made a pleasant change for them to read tales of valiant heroes, high adventure, mysteries, and horror, written in an exaggerated, exciting style. Turgenev wrote in his story Knock knock Knock of 1870 :

(Marlinsky) in the 30's thundered like no one else - even Pushkin, according to the youth of that time, could not be compared to him. He not only enjoyed the fame of being the foremost Russian writer, he even - which is much more difficult and is met with rarely - set his seal to some degree on the generation contemporary to him. Heroes à la Marlinsky turned up everywhere, particularly in the provinces and especially amongst soldiers and gunners; they spoke with "a storm in the heart and fire in the blood". Women's hearts were "devoured" by them. The nickname "fatal" was coined about them then. This type, as is generally known, was preserved for a long while until the time of Pechorin.¹

Characters that now seem pallid and monotonous were vastly popular because Russian readers liked their strong and free ego with its passionate aspiration to exploits and elevated goals; they were glad to read endlessly about these unusual human personalities who stood above everyday life, rejected the degeneracy and obsolescence of society, and themselves formed new, majestic, beautiful ideals. What now appears inflated and bombastic then appeared as symptoms of grandeur.

1. I.S.Turgenev, Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy i pisem, vol. 10, M - L. 1965,

The same thing befell Bestuzhev's style, which now looks almost absurd, but in the 1820's and 1830's impressed readers immensely. Bestuzhev, endowed with a fiery imagination and playful wit, developed and adorned the simple, smooth Karamzinian language; after classical, regular, elegant and refined forms, echoing with coldness and monotony, Bestuzhev's motliness of language seemed very attractive. The brightness of his style was taken for fire, liveliness and power; readers were pleased with his roundabout fashion of expressing a thought or feeling, and his comparisons were judged not by their truthfulness to nature or by their beauty, but by their strangeness and quality of surprise. This is the explanation for his immediate success, sudden decline, and present unreadability.

His greatest contribution to the development of Russian literature was his creation of the historical, social, nautical, military and Caucasian tales. His own comment on his achievement provides perhaps the most befitting epitaph to his work:

The historical tales of Marlinsky, in which he threw off the paths of book language and began to speak in living Russian dialect, opened up the doors into the mansion of the full novel. *

Belinsky too saw this as Bestuzhev's main contribution to Russian literature:

Just as Sumarokov, Kheraskov, Petrov, Bogdanovich and Knyazhmin tried with all their might to withdraw from reality and naturalness in invention and style - so Marlinsky endeavoured to the fullest extent to draw near to both. ¹

The ^{significance} ~~enormity~~ of Bestuzhev's effort was certainly incontrovertible, in spite of any ensuing faults, and deserves recognition even today.

1. Belinsky, op. cit., vol. 4. p 28.

APPENDIX 1.

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The Historical Program of Free Thought in Russia.

(Letter to Nicholas I from the Peter and Paul Fortress). *

Since I am convinced that you, my sovereign, love the truth, I shall make no bold as to give you an account of the historical program of free thought in Russia as well as many general ideas which constituted the moral and political basis of the enterprise of the 18th century. I shall speak with perfect frankness, without concealing the worst or even carefully veiling the good.

APPENDIX II

Translation of Bestuzhev's Letter to the Tsar.

The beginning of the Emperor Alexander's reign brought with it the most brilliant hopes for the welfare of Russia. The nobility had recovered its strength, the merchants did not complain at the terms of credit, the troops served without any trouble, the scholars studied whatever they wanted; everyone said what they thought, and everyone expected still better because there was no such thing as bad luck. Unfortunately, circumstances did not permit these hopes to be realized - hopes grown old without fulfillment. The unexpected war of 1807 and others of long standing threw the Russian people into disorder;

* This letter, written in 1824, can be found in V. G. Kravtsov, *Bestuzhev*, M.-L., 1951, pp. 510 - 511.

Further footnotes in this letter are Bestuzhev's own.

The Historical Progress of Free Thought in Russia.

(Letter to Nicholas I from the Petropavlovsk Fortress). *

Since I am convinced that you, my sovereign, love the truth, I shall make so bold as to give you an account of the historical progress of free thought in Russia as well as many general ideas which constituted the moral and political side of the enterprise of the 14th. December. I shall speak with perfect frankness, without concealing the worst or even carefully weighing my words, for the duty of a loyal subject is to tell his king the unadorned truth. I shall proceed.

The beginning of the Emperor Alexander's reign brought with it the most brilliant hopes for the welfare of Russia. The nobility had recovered its strength, the merchants did not complain at the terms of credit, the troops served without any trouble, the scholars studied whatever they wanted; everyone said what they thought, and everyone expected still better because there was so much that was good. Unfortunately, circumstances did not permit these hopes to be realised - hopes grown old without fulfilment. The unsuccessful war of 1807 and others of long standing threw the financial position into disorder;

* This letter, written in 1825, can be found in V. Orlov's, Dekabristy, M-L, 1951, pp 510 - 514.

Further footnotes in this letter are Bestuzhev's own.

but in the preparations for the Great Patriotic War this had as yet gone unheeded. Finally Napoleon invaded Russia, and then the Russian people for the first time became aware of its strength; then there awoke in all hearts a feeling of independence, at first political, and subsequently national too. This was the beginning of free thought in Russia. The government itself pronounced the words: "freedom, liberation!" The government itself distributed works on the evil of the absolute power enjoyed by Napoleon, and the banks of the Rhine and the Seine resounded with the clarion call of the ruler of Russia. The war was still dragging on when soldiers returning home first murmured their grievances amongst the people. "We shed our blood" they said "but again they compel us to toil at the corvée. We saved our fatherland from the tyrant, but again lords tyrannise over us". The troops, from generals to privates, on their arrival home kept talking only of how pleasant it was in foreign lands. Comparison with one's own land naturally raised the question: why is it not so here? At the outset, while these matters were discussed without hindrance, they were just ideas idly blowing in the wind, for the human mind is as gunpowder - dangerous when under pressure. A gleam of hope that

the sovereign emperor would grant a constitution, as he once hinted at the opening of the Polish representative assembly in Warsaw, as well as the attempt by several generals to liberate their slaves, still served as an encouragement to many people. But after 1817 everything changed. Men, who had witnessed the worst or desired the best, were compelled to converse in secret because of the innumerable spies - and thus were born secret societies. The fact that the high command oppressed praiseworthy officers kept tempers on the boil. The preference for German names to Russian ones offended national pride. Then soldiers began to say: "Why did we free Europe, so as to impose its chains on ourselves? Why did we grant a constitution to France, so as not to dare to speak about it? Why did we purchase at the cost of our blood supremacy amongst the nations, so as to be humiliated at home?" The destruction of model schools and the persecution of enlightenment led to despairing considerations about the most drastic steps that should be taken. And as the complaints of the people, arising from exhaustion and the way in which the district council and civil authorities abused their position, threatened bloody revolution, societies formed the intention of averting a greater evil by channelling a lesser one and of beginning action at the first available opportunity. Now I shall describe the situation in which we saw Russia.

Napoleon's troops, like locust, had left behind as their legacy the seeds of destruction. Many provinces had been rendered poverty-stricken, and the government through the dilatory measures it adopted or the meagre assistance it proffered, allowed them to fall into utter ruin. Other regions had been reduced to famine because of rain and drought. Whilst a third of Russia had its hands full with the organisation of badly built roads, the corn rotted in the fields. The abuses of the district police officers became more noticeable to the impoverished peasants ¹ and the oppressions of the nobles more perceptible, because they had begun to understand the rights of man. ²

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1. It is possible to write a book about the oppressions of the district officials. The slightest order from above gives them cause for a thousand constraints and bribes. Sometimes they will take the peasants away for haymaking or the harvest and the latter do nothing for a month. Sometimes they will give them something to do and then break their backs, claiming that the work is being improperly carried out. They assign the far-off work to those who are nearest and vice-versa, so as to take some roubles from them for exemptions. And moreover they exact additional taxes, without any reason, so that triple the legal taxation is paid per head, and so on.
 2. The behaviour of Russian nobles in this respect is appalling. Negroes on plantations are happier than many landowners' peasants. To sell families by retail, to corrupt innocence, to seduce the wives of peasants, is considered natural and is carried out openly. Not to mention the corvée and quitrents, there are even monsters who give their wolfhound puppies to be breast-fed by peasant women!! Fortunately for mankind, such cases are rare, but to its shame they do exist.

The prohibition of distillation destroyed all openings in this market for family men in many provinces, while the increase in public houses corrupted morality and ruined the peasant way of life. The military colonies paralysed not only the intellects but all the trades of the places where they were established, and struck terror in the remainder. The frequent marches of the regiments drove the local residents beyond the bounds of patience; scarcity of money meant that the peasants were unable to repay their arrears - in short, they all sighed for the old days, they all grumbled at the present, they all thirsted for better, to such an extent that an empty rumour that situations were being offered in the Amu Darya attracted thousands of the inhabitants of the Ukraine - whither, they knew not. Whole villages disbanded and wandered at random, and numerous insurrections of the corvées marked the three last years of Alexander's reign.

The middle class is respected and important in all other countries; in our country it is miserable, poor, burdened with obligations, deprived of means of a livelihood. In other nations they inhabit the towns, but in ours, as the towns exist only on the map ¹ and freedom of the trades is hampered by the guilds, they roam from place to place like gypsies, indulging in scrupulous resales.

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1. It is not difficult to find the cause for the emptiness of our towns. The lower departments do not have a decisive voice. And litigants go to the capital. For this same reason the highest nobility shuns posts that do not command respect and in order to gain medals rushes to do nothing in some ministerial office or other. For whom is the craftsman to work there? For our nobility keeps half-baked workmen.

The decline in trade affected them all the more heavily because of their poverty, for they depend on the merchants like petty tradesmen or like workers in the factories.

The merchant class, hampered by the guilds and impeded in means of delivery, suffered grave losses: in 1812 many colossal fortunes were lost, others were upset. Business with the State ruined many merchants and contractors, and along with them their clients and creditors, by delay in payment, discounts and unjust niggardliness in receipt of goods. Extortion penetrated every corner. Corrupt opinion empowered the regulations on promissory notes to be tampered with.¹

Fraudulent bankrupts increased, and all trust was lost. The precariousness of the tariff reduced many manufacturers to poverty, discouraged others, and destroyed confidence in our government among our own as well as foreign merchants. The result of this was a still greater decline in our rate of exchange (i.e. foreign credit), proceeding from government duties, and the general complaint that there was no ready money. The prohibitive system which made smugglers rich did not raise the prices on our articles, and, following the fashion,

1. Obviating the previous law on the person of the bankrupt (contrainte
par corps).

everyone paid exorbitant sums for so-called confiscated goods. Finally the decree that the bourgeoisie and petty traders either subscribe to the guilds or pay taxes would have dealt a decisive blow to trade, but the failure to carry it out did not keep them from grumbling. However, even without this, the decline in trade was so enormous that at the main fairs and in the ports barter and delivery abroad decreased by a third. The merchants still complained with some justification at foreigners, especially the English, who in spite of the regulations ¹ have their own agents in the villages, and, buying up at first hand raw products to export abroad, thereby deprive petty traders of business and the State of the circulation of capital.

The nobility was also dissatisfied on account of the poor market for its products, the expensiveness of luxury commodities and the long-drawn-out legal proceedings. It is divided into three categories: the enlightened, of whom the majority comprise the aristocracy; the literate, who either torture others in the capacity of judges, or are themselves dragged through lawsuits, and, finally the ignorant, who live in villages,

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1. They were permitted only to indulge in wholesale purchase, without entering into minor transactions.

act as church elders, or are already in retirement, having served, God knows how, in field regiments. Of these the ones owning small estates constitute the bane of Russia; always at fault and always grumbling, wishing to live not according to their income but according to their pretensions, they torture their poor peasants mercilessly. The others ruin themselves on hunting, trifles (i.e. chapels), life in the capital, or lawsuits. The majority of the highest nobility, serving in the army or in the capitals, demand luxury and entrust their estates to stewards, who fleece the peasants and deceive their masters, and thus 9/10 of the estates in Russia are ruined or mortgaged. The rural clergy are in a pitiful position; since they receive no salary, they throw themselves utterly on the mercy of the peasants, and therefore, compelled to please them, have themselves lapsed into vice - for the removal of which the clergy were established. While the rural clergy led a beggarly life devoid of all respect, an edict regarding the dress of priests' wives aggravated and annoyed the wealthy clergy in the towns.

The soldiers grumbled at their exhaustion with drills, cleaning and sentry duty, the officers at the meagre wages and excessive severity, the sailors at unskilled labour, doubled by abuses, ¹ naval officers at

1. For example, in the Petersburg and Kronstadt admiralties it is prescribed: firstly - 90 horses for pulling logs, secondly - I don't know the exact number. But the point is that not one horse does any work but instead takes various officials visiting. In place of the horses unfortunate sailors are harnessed. My brother Nikolay and lieutenant - captain Torson can give more detailed information on a large number of abuses in the fleet.

in the treasury, the courts, and the commissariats, among governors and governor-generals, whenever interest was involved, whoever could - stole, and whoever did not dare - pilfered. Everywhere honest people suffered, whilst sneaks and cheats rejoiced.

You already know, my sovereign, how, enraged at seeing Russia in such a condition and all elements ready for change, we decided to promote a revolution. Now I shall be so bold as to state before your majesty that in doing this we intended to find our support in general in the rights of the people and in particular in the neglected Russians. But in addition Batenkov and I declared that at this time (that is about the 14th. December) we had a political right to it, as it was clearly an interregnum. For your majesty refused the crown, and we knew that the abdication of the Crown Prince had already taken place.¹ Besides, my liege, as you awaited acknowledgement from the Council and the Senate, you in some way recognised the sovereignty of the people, for government (without an autocrat) is no other than the people's top representative body. Consequently, acting in the name of the people, we did not oppose your majesty, but merely acted so as to impede the Senate and Council from recognising something other than our own nomination.

1. Our mistake consisted in the fact that we did not know about the nomination of your majesty as heir to the throne.

Denying the right of the people during an interregnum to choose itself a ruler or a government would have cast doubt upon the reigning dynasty's very right to the throne of Russia. Further, Anne as ruler, supported by the wishes of the people, dispensed with her obligations. Catherine the Great led the Guards and crowd which proclaimed her against Peter III. They both opposed the government in the name of the people. Is right really only on the side of success? Politics, eliminating personalities, looks only at the facts. We indeed were released from one oath of allegiance, and did not take another. Your majesty will find it easy to perceive the weakness of this argument, but at the same time I was convinced of its correctness and acted in this conviction.

Here are the dreams we cherished for the future. We intended to establish a Senate of the oldest and wisest Russians, into which we hoped to attract all the important men of the present administration, for we thought that power and ambition would always serve as a bait; to form a Palace of Deputies by the choice of the people from all classes. As it is indisputably impossible to ascertain or foster public opinion without linking it to the interest of every man, we therefore based the disinterestedness of judges on this principle. We would have given each department its own particular range of duties; moreover

Litigants could have chosen at will any judge from a given number, so that honour and interest would have compelled them to be more truthful one to the other, whilst the legal proceedings, made public and restricted in duration, and the freedom of the press would have exposed those prone to negligence or duplicity. For the enlightenment of the lower classes of the people we wished to establish Lancasterian schools everywhere; and in order to restore its morality, to raise the standard of the secular clergy by granting it a means of livelihood. The removal of distillation and the improvement of roads between those places suffering from a shortage in corn and those with a surplus, through fiscal measures, the encouragement of agriculture and the general protection of industry would have satisfied the peasants. The constant guarantee of rights would have attracted to Russia many efficient foreigners. Factories would have increased along with the growing demand for synthetic goods, while competition would have stimulated improvement, which rises on a par with the prosperity of the people, because the necessity of commodities for a pleasant life of luxury is a continual one. The capital stagnating in England, ensured as a certain income for many years in advance, would have begun to pour into Russia, for in this new reconstructed world it could be utilised more profitably than in East India or America. The removal or at least the restriction of the prohibitive

system and the construction of means of communication - not where easiest (as formerly) but where most necessary, ¹ as well as the establishment of a national merchant navy, so as not to pay foreigners expensive freight for one's own products and so as to direct transit trade into Russian hands, would have allowed trade to flourish, - this muscle, so to speak, of state power. We wished to restore finances by decreasing the army and generally all paid and unnecessary officials by a third. As for foreign policy, we believed in acting openly, living peaceably with everyone in the world, without interfering in the affairs of others and without permitting them to intervene in ours, not heeding rumours, not fearing threats, for Russia is independent and can, in case of the severing of diplomatic relations, manage without outside assistance. In it is contained a whole world; and the trading benefits to other nations would never allow it to go short of anything. I will pass the rest over in silence, as it is already familiar to your majesty either from the constitution

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1. Why, for example, does the Severnyy Canal exist, along which two boats a year sail? What was the intention behind the Kubinsky? Why should we trade with the Arctic? What was the Sestrinsky started for? For luxury articles sent from Petersburg to Moscow, are easily transported by cart, and are not a main necessity of life.

of Nikita Muravev, which was however nothing more than an experiment, or from the testimonies of other members.

As far as I personally am concerned, being a professed ultra-liberal so as to win the trust of my comrades, I inwardly inclined towards a monarchy, moderated by the aristocracy. Desiring the good of my country, I confess that at the same time I was tainted by ambition. And this is why I agreed to the opinion of Batenkov, that it would have been a good thing to put Alexander Nikolayevich on the throne. ¹

Flattering me, Batenkov used to say that as a noble by birth and as a man who had participated in the revolution I could hope to find myself among the ruling aristocracy, which would bring about the gradual liberation of Russia while the tsar was still young. But as we both saw an obstacle in the person of your majesty, - to kill you, my liege, never entered my head as a man of honour, - in moments of decision I toyed with the thought of the Crown Prince, considering this to be the easiest means of reconciling all parties and the thing most flattering to my pride, for I reckoned myself, of course, no worse than the Orlovs in the days of Catherine. I scarcely ever took part in the debates of the Duma, for I knew that actions speak louder than words, and I admit to your majesty that if the Izmaylovsky regiment had joined us, I would

1. I do not recollect whether I mentioned this in my testimony to the Committee, for, considering myself guilty on all counts, I did not have recourse to any excuses in particular.

have taken command and decided on an attempt to attack, the plan of which was already whirling in my head. However, if it had not been for that fateful day of the 14th., I would have adhered to the advice of Batenkov (the most reasonable man among us) to go on with our plans and, occupying the important posts in the government, little by little to effect change either by implementing the authority borrowed from the throne or by indoctrinating others with our own ideas. We already wished to do this with regard to the Crown Prince, discussing this topic with his royal highness the Duke Virtembergsky.

And let this be, your imperial highness, yet another proof of the respect which I bear your magnanimity, and an acknowledgement of the opinion we had concerning your character even formerly. We were fully aware of the talents with which nature had endowed you; we knew that you, my sovereign, occupy yourself with affairs of government and are well-read. It was evident too from the Izmaylovsky regiment that the militarism with which you were reproached was directly attributable to the political situation. Moreover the pursuits of the division under your command, by real feats of soldiering at manoeuvres, proved the opposite to be true. But the anecdotes that circulated about the severity of your majesty frightened many people - including us. I confess to having said more than once that Emperor Nicholas would be a despot by virtue of his way of thinking and his harshness, all the more dangerous because his

perspicacity would threaten all intelligent and loyal men with persecution; that he, being himself enlightened, would deal well-aimed blows at enlightenment; that our fate would be decided at the moment of his accession, and therefore it would be of little consequence whether we died today or tomorrow.

But experience has taught me my mistake, repentance has cleansed my soul, and I now take delight in trusting to the blessed paths of Providence I have no doubt, owing to several signs which have penetrated even to my dungeon, that your imperial highness has been sent to cure the ills of Russia, to calm and direct towards good the prevailing discontent, and to elevate our fatherland to pre-eminence. I am sure that heaven has granted us in you another Peter the Great and more than Peter, for in our age and with your capabilities, my liege, to be him would be a small achievement. This thought at times alleviates my sufferings, for myself and for my brothers; and my prayers for the happiness of my country which is inseparable from the true glory of your majesty, fly up to the Celestial Throne.

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